1957

Gibbons' Funeral; a short novel

Robert Cyrus Noe
The University of Montana

GIBBONS' FUNERAL

A Short Novel

by

CYRUS NOE

B. A. Montana State University, 1953

Presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
1957

Approved by:

Robert O. Bowen
Chairman, Board of Examiners

Ellis Waldron
Dean, Graduate School

SEP 6 1957
Date

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

INTRODUCTION

Gibbons' Funeral is not intended as an extension of any specific tradition of the novel. Most novels written by Americans, though possibly not the best ones, are probably not designed to fit a specific tradition since the divisions within the genre are not so clearly defined as they are for European novelists, just as social and intellectual distinctions are not so clearly defined in America as they are in Europe. It is no doubt possible to list specific traditions based on types of the American novel, but getting novelists to follow them might be another matter. However, since no novel, whatever the author's intention, can--like T. S. Eliot's poem in the tradition of poetry--have its meaning alone, each novel will have a positive relationship to some tradition, and, equally valuable, a negative relationship, or contrast.

The tradition in which Gibbons' Funeral most nearly fits is that of the novel concerned with an artist's sense of isolation from society. However, this judgement does not operate exclusively, for this novel might also be called, in part, a novel of manners, and, in some minor ways, a philosophical nove. The most important qualification of the category of isolation is that the tradition seems

to be more nearly the Continental than the American or English. Robert Ohnmachtig, the architect-artist of Gibbons' Funeral is an American, but America plays only an incidental part in what happens to him; it could have happened almost anywhere. By education and taste, Ohnmachtig is a Continental European; only in point of fact is he an expatriate American. His artistic concerns are systematically esthetic, a tendency more usually though not necessarily associated with Continental artists.

Were Gibbons' Funeral strictly a philosophical novel, that is, a novel of ontological questions and answers, its subject matter might place it in the tradition of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, if those two and their followers can be said to provide a quorum for a tradition. In this novel, the question of solipsism is made directly in the prologue; the tale of the man standing in the light of a shop window, also in the foreword, is in the way of being an allegory of what existentialists call Being and Otherness, with Ohnmachtig as Being becoming aware of Otherness and trying to contact it; moreover, a case might be made for the scene in which the architect loses his glasses as an instance or symbolical enactment of that traumatic existential moment in which it is claimed a being realizes the primacy of his existence, his oneness and aloneness, his irrevocable involvement with himself to the

exclusion of everything else. However, such instances are only incidentally significant in determining tradition because they are not part of a consistently and consciously adjusted philosophical pattern. The events which are also possible existential allegories seek in the main to reinforce a sense of the human predicament at hand, in whatever terms, and not to demonstrate the validity of any ontological dogma. Nevertheless, the sense of utter isolation to which sensitive men are victims (strikingly made into an image by the Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset, whose ideas paralleled those of the existentialists in some respects, as: "Life is, in itself and forever, shipwreck.") is an emotional fact documented in life and literature, even if it is not, as the existentialists insist it is, the basic human condition.

Further, Gibbons' Funeral might be considered partly a novel of manners because it details realistically the appearance, speech, and behavior peculiar to persons living special lives in special places, i.e., their manners. This effort, which is akin to satire, might seem beside the point were it not for the fact that, through such details, an author may be able to suggest the character of the society from which the artist is isolated and by contrast emphasize how difficult it is for a sensitive artist to enter a society in which dude ranch employees and guests,

evangelist ministers, and garrulous old men are at large. Most fiction which makes use of such details might be related in this way to the tradition of the novel of manners. For example, in such works concerned with the isolation of the artist as Thomas Mann's "Tonio Kroger," "Death in Venice," "Blood of the Walsungs," "Tristan," Felix Krull and Buddenbrooks, and Jacob Wassermann's The World's Illusion, The Mauritzius Case, and the Kerkhoven novels, there is rich detail of manners which has the effect of creating a background to help define characters and their relationships. To be specific, though not in all the above works, it is details of speech and behavior of Kloterjahn in "Tristan," the three previous heads-of-family in Buddenbrooks, of the fiance in "Blood of the Walsungs," and of family and friends in The World's Illusion that set Detlev Spinell, Hanno Buddenbrooks, Siegmund and Sieglinde Aarenhold, and Christian Wahnschaffe so definitely apart. To such an extent, and confined to those early chapters dealing with the architect's sojourn at the dude ranch and in some of his relationships with the Gibbons family, this novel might be called in part a novel of manners.

If Gibbons' Funeral then is more in the tradition of the Continental, and more specifically the German, novel of the isolated artist than in any other, it follows

that its central character, the architect, must be related to such representative artists as Mann's Tonio Kroger and Gustave von Aschenbach, Hermann Hesse's Joseph Knect and Harry Haller, and Wassermann's Christian Wahnschaffe and Joseph Kerkhoven. It must be remembered, in the light of the fact that many of these persons were not actually artists, that a person need only have that sensitive temperament commonly associated, at least in Europe, with the artist, to qualify for the tradition of the isolated artist.

When Ohnmachtig turns from his way of life as inadequate to his problems, he is doing what Knecht and Kerkhoven did. Knecht, after his election to the leadership of an intellectual-esthetic-monastic order of bead players, feels that he would be of more use in the world beyond and below and resigns to become a teacher. Kerkhoven, a doctor, leaves his quiet life as a middle-class practitioner to meet evil in the blood and minds of men in as vast a sphere as he can find. The point of departure is that both Knecht and Kerkhoven act on moral principle, Ohnmachtig on a personal, a psychological one. Kroger wants to return to the simple, non-problematical friends and loves of his childhood, to find solace in the common world that Ohnmachtig enters, but Kroger cannot. Kroger realizes, as Ohnmachtig in his desperation does not, that his is an irreducible distance

from the world of dancing peasants. Haller, Hesse's Steppenwolf, discovers the delights of the simple world in a miraculous spate of debaucher, even manages to know the flesh of that first love that so eluded Kroger; and Haller enters this world in the agency of a friend, as Ohnmachtig hoped to. Like Ohnmachtig, Haller is the bestower of a document containing the adventure. Both end their journeys into the mundane by moving into what, in Ohnmachtig's case, is plainly a religious escape, in Haller's a quasi-religious, mystical relief. But Haller's adventure is largely a fantasy, which makes parallels between his fantastic circumstances and Ohnmachtig's literal ones an imprecise business.

Von Aschenbach pays a price of moral and physical degeneration for his isolation, which he sought as rationally as Ohnmachtig sought his. But Ohnmachtig is not required to pay von Aschenbach's price because there is no suggestion that Ohnmachtig cut himself away from humankind immorally, which might be said of von Aschenbach. And in Ohnmachtig's relationship with Gibbons, there is no homosexuality intended; the rancher should not be taken for a symbol of Dionysian voluptuousness. Wahnschaffe belongs with Knecht, Kerkhoven, and Ohnmachtig as a forsaker of a lonely way of life in favor of a more immediate and intimate connection with mankind; like Knect and Kerkhoven, but unlike Ohnmachtig, Wahnschaffe's is first of all a moral decision.

Moreover, Wahnschaffe's journey to the prosaic world results, as does Ohnmachtig's, in friendships that bring grief rather than solace, in Wahnschaffe's case Voss and the whore, in Ohnmachtig's case the rancher. Their friends' needs cause both to respond in the ways they are able to respond, the architect in the way of his training, Wahnschaffe as a supplier of money in one case and a caretaker in the other. Both fail finally. The architect fails because his break with his past was not complete enough to let him confide in the rancher, Wahnschaffe because the world had in effect destroyed his friends before he had understanding or power to help them. Wahnschaffe, the stronger, goes farther into the depths of the world; Ohnmachtig, once rebuffed, takes the refuge of the monastery.

It is probably by now obvious that the architect of Gibbons' Funeral probably has no strict parallel among those romantic heroes to which he is nonetheless related. If we define a romantic hero, without pretending either precision or universality, as a person or fictional character who has no, or very few, commitments to the world in which he lives, we find Ohnmachtig's basic strain of heritage. By detaching himself from the world, the romantic hero can note where the world is going without having to go himself. From his isolated point of observation, he can try to find where he might identify himself, as one might watch a parade,

which, if marched in, could not be scrutinized.

Ohnmachtig, of course, resembles the violent heroes very little because the evenness of his personality, if not the nature of his problem, preclude the excesses of such typical romantic heroes as Stendahl's Julian Sorel, Byron's Manfred or Byron himself, Shelley, Melville's Ahab, or Jose Zorrilla's Don Juan Tenorio. Ohnmachtig is a man of contemplation rather than a man of action, but this introversion does not lead him to the self-violence of such heroes as Hawthorne's Ethan Brand or Goethe's Werther.

His journals relate him to such non-fictional confessor heroes as Rousseau, Wolfe, and Proust. However, his critical time was not his youth or early manhood, but a period near age fifty when he came under a sentence of blindness. He may question the values of that former life, but he does not search through that life for meaning. It is the meaning of the dark future that torments the architect, and it is not particularly his own past that interests him.

The thing that distinguishes Ohnmachtig from the violent and confessor heroes, as well as from such other outcasts as Chateaubriand's Rene, D. H. Lawrence's Birkin, as well as the outsiders of Wolfe, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway, is the calm way in which he chose to be apart. He took his isolation reasonably and without significant bitterness, and there is an indication in the remembered conversation

at Antwerp that his regret that he had to be an outcast from his age was not a very poignant regret. It is only when he is faced with a threat to the sense that has nourished his solitude that it seems untenable to him, that he must try to enter the world from which he and the other heroes have been exiled.

The presence of the literal subject of Gibbons' Funneral as a major character in a novel claimed to be Continental is not altogether easy to explain. However, to bring the architect to Montana was to bring him to a community pared of those things which the architect resolved, at least temporarily, to leave behind. The scene might well have been Australia, but Chnmachtig's being an American made it seem fitting to test him at the desert edges of his native ground.

Gibbons is somewhat of a romantic hero in his own right although the kind of life he had to lead to remain a solvent rancher, coupled with a limited sensibility, did not permit him the kind of total or near-total non-commitment to which we have referred. He was detached, though, vaguely dissatisfied with his ostensibly fortunate lot, emotionally distant from the lives of his family, a man with few friends. In some respects of personality, his isolation made him the forthright, uncomplicated man that certain romantics are said to have wanted to make of the savage, noble or otherwise. His was the often taciturn virility of the romantic

hero as man of action, the legend in France stretching from Chateaubriand's Chactas to Alain-Fournier's Meaulness, in Germany culminating in Wagner's dream of Siegfried and Nietzsche's Uebermensch, and in America moving from Cooper's Deerslayer to the throng of tight-lipped cowboys in pulp magazines and motion pictures. However, Gibbons' silence is not meant to be the governor of his country wisdom, but rather the evidence of his sense of meaninglessness in the world, his sense of isolation. Further, he is not natural man in harmony with nature; he has little if any of the broad understanding of fundamental life attributed to Abel in W. H. Hudson's Green Mansions or to the elder brother in Walter Van Tilburg Clark's Track of the Cat.

Gibbons' error, as old as Midas, was that he wanted to take material success and order for spiritual success and order. In getting rid of the old, disorganized ranch house in favor of a new, carefully planned one, he hoped to trade the old, disorganized world for a new, carefully planned one. This theme is a variant of the American dream of efficiency and material success equating with happiness. However, the architect as agency of the new order compels his friendship, and the rancher becomes as involved with the messiah as with the world-to-come. This friendship enlarges the rancher's idea of the new world and his responsibilities to it, giving him, finally, the basis of his

misunderstanding out of which he kills himself trying to spare the life of a rabbit, which must have seemed to him a literal duty based on his friend's attitude towards life. Both Gibbons and Knect die at the threshold of the new world, Knecht because the strength of his body was not equal to the strength of his mind, Gibbons because he took a symbol literally, even as he had hoped an ordered house would mean an ordered world.

PROLOGUE

The summer afternoon in Paris was hot and close. Vapor from the river steamed up and mingled with our sweat. Leaves hung down from their branches like wet flags, the damp air shimmered over the asphalt, the people caught in the city gasped and stood still when they could. My friend Robert Ohnmachtig and I sat in a green park along the Seine, not because it was the only place we had to talk, but because the park was convenient to our meeting place in front of Notre Dame. That afternoon Ohnmachtig needed to be heard, and I listened. He was not much concerned with the esthetic loves which had sustained him so long--those beautiful puzzles of lines, surfaces, and forms, of substance and space; rather his talk wandered through an arena of feelings and events, a noisy place full of people behaving as people do when no principle or order governs them, when they are moved or passed over by that enigma which ought not to have a name, but which we call fate.

What he said that afternoon helped account for certain changes I had already noticed in him. First of all, there had been his effusive greetings at Cherbourg: the eager handshake, the tight grip on my arm, the almost hysterical

smile behind which I sensed a desperate fatigue and preoccupation. After the liner which I had come from Paris to meet had floated listlessly to dock, I had gone aboard to find Ohnmachtig standing hatless on cabin deck, shading his eyes as he leaned on the rail and stared out over the quay. I hesitated for a moment, for he seemed to be looking for something intently, but in an instant I knew he was looking for nothing in particular; there was nothing where he was looking but a dim view of France. He turned with a start at the sound of his name, and when I saw his face, he seemed to be an old man coming home tired from a long journey to a foreign land. He almost ran to me, and as we walked along the deck, he kept a tight hold on my arm as if he were afraid he might lose track of me. His relief at finding me at dockside was quite out of proportion, and half a dozen times before we left the ship he thanked me for coming. While picking up his briefcase and hat in his stateroom, he asked me about the health of my wife and children. Less than five minutes later on the gangplank, he asked me about them again.

The reserve and self-possession which I had come to associate with him as certainly as his eyes, features, or stature had been eroded away in a torrent, leaving him in the grip of such a bewilderment that I felt as if he were acting the part of another man, a frantic stranger who had

lost his sense of continuity in the world.

Then there had been the matter of his giving me his journals as we rode the boat train to Paris. I had not known he kept journals, but I was not surprised to learn he did or surprised that I had not known of them. It was quite in keeping with his way of life for him to set down some sort of precise and reasonable account of his impressions, even the private states of his innere Mann. But to hand them to a friend, saying something like, "These are my journals I have kept for twenty-five years. Here, I'm giving them to you. I no longer need them," was an act I would not have thought him capable of. I cannot remember his exact words when he handed them to me across the footspace because I was quite shocked, and perhaps embarrassed; the gift was a confidence I did not think I had earned.

Until we talked later in Paris that afternoon in the park, I did not know that I might account for the changes by reading the journals. I should have read them at once, but I was quite busy as soon as I got back to Paris; I knew we should meet in two days, and I felt whatever help I might offer could be offered at that time. And too, he had known I would be aware of his trouble, but though he made little effort to hide the signs of it, he chose not to talk about it until our second meeting.

On the train, he had scrutinized each weary village as we sped by it, stared fascinated at the Norman countryside that drifted past the window of our compartment as though he were seeing it for the first time, as a tourist might; this from a man whose French was so appropriate that a Surete officer at Cherbourg had looked up in some surprise when Ohnmachtig had laid in front of him the green passport of an American.

I had watched him through customs and immigration on the quay. His light-gray suit was just far enough from currency to assert the distinction of anti-fashion, the leather of his briefcase was elegant and dark with careful use, his voice despite his fatigue was crisp and certain. One might have taken him for a scholar, a professor, and a scientist, all of which, of course, he was.

In that mixture of Europe's virtue, vice, and indifference which wandered to and fro on the quay, Ohnmachtig seemed to disappear, to merge with the crowd. He was an inch or so below average height, likely five feet, six. The turning of his hair from dull blond to gray was hardly perceptible; his nose was rather short in his oblong face. Something in the tight way he held his mouth made his jaw seem squarish. His complexion was the color of pale parchment as fitted a man who spent much of his time indoors. The lenses of his glasses were thick and powerful, distorting at close range the shape and movements

of his dark eyes, but at a distance giving him no special distinction. At this edge of the Atlantic, he became at once homogenous with Europe, a man one would suppose if one glanced at him to be someone out of the ordinary, but not out of the ordinary in any special way, if you understand what I mean. And the chances are that one would not glance at him. Perhaps it was because of his very dignity and self-assurance that he became indistinguishable in that bawling horde of lost men on the quay, because he seemed to know exactly what he was going to do next.

Watching him make his peace with the clutter of dockside officialdom, displaying a manner blended expertly of helpfulness and disdain, I had forgotten how disturbed he had looked. I considered him the most well-ordered man in existence. The urge to maintain habits of mind, the ponderous inertia of opinion, obscured my unsettling discovery. Even after we were alone in our compartment, I pretended nothing had changed until after he had given me the journals. Then for an instant he was nothing but a friend with troubles or sorrows, and I almost asked him point blank what was the matter. Something in the way he was trying to control himself made the question seem one he would not want to be asked, so instead I wanted to know if he would be sending for the journals.

His dark eyes turned in their crystals and met mine for a moment, then looked down. "No," he said deliberately,

"I want you to keep them. They are yours to do with what you will." The train whistled past a crossing and he looked apprehensive. One of his neat hands moved as though he intended to reach over to take them back. "You will keep them, won't you? You won't destroy them?"

I said I would, rather strongly because of his anxiety. As I did, I saw he already regretted his outburst, but that he was somewhat relieved at my emotion.

I might have taken all this for a pose if I had been able to think of Ohnmachtig as a <u>poseur</u>. He had never dramatized himself; that was part of the bargain he had made earlier in life that one has a right to expect of those who mate the beast of art. Not much of his philosophy would have broken off if it had been rolled down a hill. One did not always know his opinions, for he had a searching and subtle mind, but one knew in what careful way, in what genuine measures, he would express his opinions, how honestly the limbs of his argument would grow from the trunk of his knowledge, and how courteously and circumspectly he would speak and listen. One need not justify one's concern for a friend's trouble. Beyond that, what disturbed me in Ohnmachtig's case was danger to a landmark. His island in the shipwrecked world had seemed firm and unassailable to me--more so, I am afraid, than my own--and I shuddered for myself as well as for my friend to watch the seas crawl

higher on its beach.

I remember a conversation we had many years ago in a cafe across from the cathedral in Antwerp. He had said to me, "I am an architect by choice and education, but I shall never be a great or famous one." I had raised my hand in protest, but he said, "No, really, I know what I'm talking about. You know many of my reasons. Let me go on."

He stopped to choose his words carefully. There was a gesture which I think of when he wanted to be particularly careful in what he was about to say, a taking off of his thick spectacles, a massaging of the bridge of his nose with the thumb and knuckle of the forefinger. "I'll be content with this proscription so long as I don't make of my weakness anything more important than a place I've been left while the stronger pilgrims crawled on to Mecca."

I asked him if <u>weakness</u> was the word he meant.

"I know it for that. It's always a weakness to fail one's age, however corrupt, to fail to make one's mark even with negative strength, to fail to be Savanarola as well as to fail to be Michelangelo." The clatter of Antwerp--bells, horns, and voices--was all around us.

"I have a tiny bit of great talent," he went on, "but not enough for the only things that count, the great things. To use this talent trivially or banally--" He sighed, but if there was regret in the sigh, it was not

poignant.

"Didn't the American Melville say that great books could only be written on great subjects? If I believe that, then there are two things I can conclude. One, that I have not enough talent to do the great things I feel are the only things worth doing; two, that today there can be no great things done." After a moment of staring into his wine, he looked at me and said, "I'd rather indict myself than the whole age. There you have it."

"You mean," I asked, nodding toward the great building across the roaring street, "that there are no more cathedrals to be built?"

"Not exactly, but what you say contains much of the force of the argument in which I should have to indict the world rather than myself. It goes like this: there may be magnificent things to be built, but we may not build them magnificently. Build another one-eared church like Antwerp, like Strasbourg? Even if I had the genius, there would be no chance. Architecture is the manipulation of space. Space comes to us today already shaped like a honeycomb. Such are the pressures of our kind of life."

A streetcar clattered by and he waited until he could be heard. "It is true that we do not believe in the God of cathedrals, nor in mystery, nor in beauty unless it serves us practically. Our monuments to Him will reflect our concepts of Him."

"What shall we do?" I asked.

"We? I am not sure. I can forsake the things I hold to be worth the most and design--" He waved his hand at alternatives in the air. "Cattle stalls, if you like. Apartment houses, office buildings. However assiduously I may work at line and surface, I must make stalls of the third dimension. Space is lost to the art. It must be cut up according to the matrix of function. That we wear like a millstone on our necks. Function for its own sake is as impossible as decoration for its own sake."

He had stared up at the gray gothic acre of the church. "Sometimes," he said quietly, "I think there is nothing worth doing now." With a smile he turned back to me. "What shall we do? Just what we are doing." Although he made a hopeless movement of his shoulders and laid his hands palms upward on the checkered cloth of the table, he did not seem to despair.

He was not yet thirty then. His blond hair was clipped short, his clothes were conservative and well-cared-for. He appeared to have his life and ideas so well in hand that one never wondered after he left where he had gone. Since he was never at loose ends, friendship for him never amounted to much of an obligation; he could be called on, he could not be called on, invited or not invited, written to or not written to. After several years of not seeing him, one might run across him almost anywhere, and

he never asked how it was he had lost track of you.

Ohnmachtig's father was a stonemason from Hesse who immigrated to the United States. Robert was an only child, born at the turn of the century after his father had become a successful contractor. His middle name, which he never used, was his mother's maiden name, a long Slavic word beginning with P. He told me once that his love for travel might be laid to the fact that he thought his mother might have had Gipsy blood. "She is a dark, lively little thing," he had said, "quite the opposite of my father, who was an archetype burgher, fair-haired, huge, and ponderous in his speech." This was after Ohnmachtig's father died and left the architect a considerable fortune. Otto Ohnmachtig had objected to his son's studying in Europe, but had been generous despite his objections. For a half-dozen years or so during the twenties, the younger Ohnmachtig had wandered from place to place, "meditating," as he called it. He studied at Tubingen, Gottingen, and Hannover in Germany, at the Hague and Liege in the low countries, at the Academy of Architecture in Paris, at Dijon, and I think in Milan. He had intended to take a degree somewhere, but after his father died, he gave up the idea.

Though he did little practical work, his knowledge of architecture was thorough and sound. He had little sympathy with any point of view in controversies over

contemporary theory, and the articles he wrote for professional publications and journals of belles-lettres was largely historical.

Before the Second World War, he usually spent the winter in Spain or Dalmatia, spring in Switzerland,--"To get away from architecture," he once wrote me from Bienne--summer in Northern Europe or England, and autumn in random travels in Europe or Asia. He visited Prague each year; he told me several times that he would stay there if he could travel no longer.

However, this is the man who had changed. When we reached Paris in the heat of that summer, we walked out of the Gare St. Lazare to a corner where two women chant in harmony the drama of the newspapers they sell. I was awarded the first cab to take me north to my hotel. He wanted to go east to a house he leased on Boulevard Haussman. We agreed to meet in two days. As I rode away, I looked back and saw him standing near the corner, not looking for a taxi, but watching the singing women. It seemed as if their music--the way they turned the awry business of the world into meter--pleased him more than getting to his house.

When we met two days later, I asked him to walk up St. Jacques with me to the Pantheon, where the French nation has stored together in anthological abandon the remains of Voltaire and Rousseau. I thought he might like to visit

the crypt. He said he had been having trouble with his eyes and doubted he could see anything in the gloom. He would rather walk across from Notre Dame to the little park called Viviani, along one side of the tiny church of St. Julien-le-Pauvre. There, in the summer's heat, I listened to him.

"Do you remember," he asked me after we sat on a bench, "what it is to be alone? Have you known what alone is?" He used einsam, the German for alone. "To be by oneself for good, irrevocably cut away from everything material, and almost everything spiritual? Unable, I mean, to be sure that the world outside is really outside at all? Not able to contact anything, but to be frozen in a nightmarish sort of Parmenidean plenum?" He stared entranced over the crowd dragging along the quay. In front of us was the stone jungle of the Ile de la Cite. West of our bench there in the penned up grass of the little park was a view of the Right Bank. As he faced all this, he seemed to be searching for a state of mind through the incantation of words.

He turned his pale face slightly toward me and said, "One night many years ago--it was early winter, I was looking out a window in a house on Rotebuhlstrasse in Stuttgart. I can't remember whose house I was in, but I think I was in Stuttgart on a holiday from Tubingen. There

was a shop below the window, and the light from it made a pattern on the sidewalk. The shop was closed, though. As I watched, a man walked into the light of the window. He was perfectly ordinary, a government clerk, or a salesman. I surely wouldn't recognize him if I saw him today. I can't even remember what was in the shop window. But I can still see something like him, if I close my eyes; I can see him come out of the winter darkness and stand in the light of the shop window. I watched for quite a time as he stood there and stared into the window; then, for some reason, he smiled. I could not have been more shocked had he fallen dead." A trickle of sweat ran down his colorless cheek.

"I thought, 'He has nowhere to go, there is nothing for him in that window; the shop is closed, and he cannot touch anything inside because it is locked behind the glass. And he smiles!' The oppression of winter was everywhere; it was bitterly cold outside, and everyone who could had retreated indoors to warm himself. But there he was, in his thin, ordinary coat, out alone in the cold, standing in front of the window and smiling. So many feelings came to me at once that I was confused, but I felt I had to do something. I ran down the two flights of stairs without my coat.

"He had walked away though, when I burst out the

door, had walked off up the street. What could I have said to him? Could I have shouted after him? What could I have shouted? I didn't know his name, who he might be, anything about him."

Ohnmachtig slumped down on the stone bench as he talked. He stared out towards the city, seeing nothing. Only his lips moved, only his voice seemed alive. The noise of Paris, of the park, went unheard.

"'Friend!' could I have shouted? 'Lonely man! Smiling man!' No, there was no name for him that I knew, and if I had called him back I could not even have asked him for the time, because the clock on the Johanneskirche was in full view. But how I wanted to call out! As he walked away, I thought desperately of some excuse to call to him, but I could think of nothing that made sense.

"The walls above him as he walked had no lights in their windows. His form grew harder and harder to see as he walked farther into the gloom. I felt as though he were the only living creature in the whole dark city, walking under walls that were built around nothing. Nothing alive, and nothing dead, for there had been nothing to die. Just nothing. Emptiness--polite, cold, final emptiness. I stood there until I was numb, long after he had disappeared, straining to see him. Finally I controlled myself, and shivering with the cold, climbed back up to the room. I tried to read, but I couldn't keep my mind on the book.

Every now and then I went back to my window to look down at the patch of light spilling out into Rotebuhlstrasse, but no one else came into the light. About eleven o'clock, someone shut off the light, and I went to bed."

Ohnmachtig sighed and sat up. "How many times I have told myself how foolish that experience was, when I have remembered it through the years. I had put it away until very recently. But now it would come back, and with it the feeling of being einsam."

He paused, and a clock chimed somewhere in the city. It must have been wrong, for no other answered it. An old man in a worn army overcoat picked up a newspaper from the grass near our bench, and walked away folding it.

"A solipsism perhaps?" he asked, lifting his eyebrows slightly. "Yes, and it has its effect on the inside as well. The feeling drains away some store of energy to keep the self alive within the self, to keep one existing through this day into the next. In some way the energy seems born through contact with the world, the self seems alive only through its relationships. When it touches nothing, it is nothing."

Children dashed by us, pursued by an older girl in a shabby dress who seemed to be trying to take charge of them, but who was too fat and slow on her feet to keep pace. "Emilie! Paul!" she shrieked, "Pas ici! Pas ici, j'ai dit!"

Ohnmachtig did not seem to see or hear.

"A few months ago," he said, "I went to a funeral of a friend of mine, in America. He was a rancher in the state of Montana. His name was Luther Gibbons. I didn't go there for Gibbons' funeral. You see, I knew him only a few months."

"Paul! Gigi! Tout le monde!" called the fat girl, frantically, but no one heeded her.

"Gibbons and the man in the light of the window--How shall I say it? Had something in common? That is close enough. Perhaps you may get a better notion from the journals. The last part of the last journal is taken up with Gibbons, with the events that led up to his death. And my feelings: almost an outpouring, I'm afraid." He sighed as though he were tired.

He said he had gone to Montana from Japan to see a naval officer friend whom he had met in Japan. Unfortunately, the friend had gone to Mexico to live, so Ohnmachtig decided to rest for a week or so at a guest ranch south of a Montana town called Nalene. He wanted to cut off the demands of coming and going, wanted to assign to time and place the few expectations he had kept. Perhaps in the mountains he could plan to dispose of that part of himself he knew he must lose.

Soundlessly barges crawled in the dull channel of the Seine. To our left, the girl in the shabby dress sat

down heavily and held her head in her hands, panting. I watched her from time to time as my friend talked about his loneliness, about the events which I would trace again in his journals. Sometimes his voice would grow so soft that I had to lean close to hear; then he would speak with such intensity that several times passersby looked aside at us. For him, the park was empty of its wanderers, empty of the fat shepherdess who had lost her sheep and wept for them as my friend wept for his.

It must have been quite late when we walked out of the park. We were silent until we reached a flight of stairs leading down to a Metro station. Then he seized my hand and said goodby.

"You won't hear from me in Spain," he said in a voice not much above a whisper. "I will receive no letters, nor write any. Please remember me."

He turned quickly and walked away. Ohnmachtig was an ordinary man in appearance; I have said that only his thick spectacles marked him, and that the distinction vanished at a distance. His smallish form in its gray summer suit blended into the texture of Paris perfectly, and had I not been following him with my eyes, I would probably not have been able to distinguish him from the others hurrying along the street. I have said that too, I think.

"Goodby!" I called after him startled by the sudden way he had gone off. He did not turn to answer, but acknowledged the call by raising his hand as he got into a taxi. There seems, as I remember, to have been an outrageous finality in the way the door of the cab slammed shut, a strange haste to the retreat of the dark vehicle.

CHAPTER I

The limousine that carried him to the ranch harkened back to its ancestors. It was called the Howard Canyon Stage, but as it glided over the winding canyon highway, Robert Ohnmachtig experienced no illusion of the West's primitive beginnings. Even the ranch itself appeared to have aged no more than a couple of decades, except for a sod-roofed building he caught a glimpse of as the limousine rolled to a stop in front of a building bearing the sign, "Headquarters Double Deuce Ranch."

Ohnmachtig climbed the stairs and paused on the porch beside an elegant red soft drink dispenser. Inside, standing behind a board counter, he saw a little gray-haired man reading what looked like an airline time table. He entered and spoke to the reader.

"Major Wheeler?"

The man's protruding eyes made him appear startled when he looked up. "Who?"

"At the Foster Hotel in Nalene, I was told I should confirm my reservations with the owner, a Major Wheeler, I believe. May I do that here?" Ohnmachtig spoke slowly and carefully in such situations, which, experience had taught him, prevented their being dragged out.

"Mrs. Larmacher isn't handy right now," the little man said, craning his neck to look out a window. "Major Wheeler stays over on the cattle ranch most of the time. You'll never find him here."

"Will you help me?"

"Mrs. Larmacher is the hostess, she's the one you want." He made the craning motion again.

"My name is Ohnmachtig. My reservation was telephoned here last night." The man behind the counter was obviously afraid of commiting some sort of trespass.

"I suppose I might as well go ahead, but she won't like it."

"Do you work here?"

He seemed offended. "Sure. Sure I do. My name's Mac." He hoisted himself up, leaned over the counter, and shook the other's hand. His face was ruddy, and the exertion of leaning over the counter turned it a shade more intense. For a few moments he shuffled papers in a basket on the counter.

"You're in number 3. I'll take you down." He came out from behind the counter and stopped.

"We don't have current in the cabins," he said, "so you have to use the lavatory in the dining hall if you got an electric shaver."

"Thank you," the other said, without offering any information.

Mac still held the airline schedule. "I fly back every year," he said positively. "I used to take the train; that was twenty years ago, when I first came here. I know my way back there. I got a standing reservation the second week of September at Asbury Park."

The ranch consisted of a dining hall and kitchen, a building of equal size which Mac called the recreation hall, an undetermined number of cabins in and out of sight among fir and pine trees, and a complex of stables and barns a quarter mile away; all were made of logs darkened with an oil preservative. As they drove to Ohnmachtig's cabin in a small truck, Mac spelled out the plan of the ranch for the guest.

In the cabin, Mac drew his cheeks full of air and puffed. "This is the front room." He might have been cold, for he stood with both hands in the pockets of his striped trousers, elbows tight against his ribs.

Overhead hung a wagon wheel, on the rim of which were fixed a half-dozen oil lamps. Mac took one reluctant hand from its pocket to take hold of a rope lashed to a stud. "Like I said, we don't have current in the cabins. Most of the guests want it that way. When it gets dark, you let the wheel down and light the lamps." He pulled the rope and the wheel swayed. "Matches in the bathroom."

The bathroom was contemporary with artificial tile

and chromium, and Mac smiled at its glitter. After he had announced meal and service schedules, he left the architect gazing at a couch covered with a plastic material that looked like polished leather, on the back cushion of which had been stitched in quilted relief the head of an enormous steer so that the soft horns would embrace the sitters at each end like friendly arms.

The two rooms were a wedding of noble pine to sophisticated linoleum. The interior walls were the reverse of the exterior's chinked logs, and the floor was planed pine laid on joists without subflooring. In front of the couch in the sitting room and beside the bed in its room were linoleum rugs covered with cattle brands he imagined had been researched from some library or other in the Middlewest.

The noon meal was imminent, so he changed from his light suit to a khaki hiking outfit of English twill, washed, and walked to the dining hall along a path that wound through evergreens along the base of a low ridge. Mac was among those on the porch of the dining hall. They seemed to be enjoying themselves; he heard their laughter before he could see them on the porch. Mac told him some of the young people were employees and some guests, but nothing in their dress or the way they mingled distinguished for Ohnmachtig the former from the latter. He and Mac

stood at one end of the railed porch.

"You see her?" Mac asked him sotto voce, nodding toward a thin girl in extremely tight trousers and a shirt noticeably unlaundered who stood in sunlight on the stairs of the porch with one boot two steps above the other. "She's Nancy Ransom. The Ransom tobacco money." Her hair was streaked with the sun's bleaching, and Ohnmachtig could hear her drawling speech to a young man standing above her on the porch.

"She's from South Carolina," Mac said with a confidential air. "Nobody puts on the dog around here." He looked as if he might want to make an exception of the fat women they saw laboring up the slight incline to the porch. "There's Old Lady Larmacher."

"You must be our new guest," she said heavily when she confronted Ohnmachtig. "I'm Hilda Larmacher." She ignored Mac, who turned and drifted away.

"Now I'm the one you call when there's anything you want. Just say, 'Mrs. L.' and I'll come running." He doubted the literal truth of what she said. She was a woman who weighed close to one-hundred eighty pounds, and her progress to the porch had been slow and difficult. Her face was round, her features shallow, her smile professional.

"We're like a family at the Double Deuce, a big, happy family." She took his arm. "Act just as if you knew

us all your life." The others were entering the hall.

"I'm sure I shall enjoy myself," he said, returning her smile.

"And you're just in time for our trip to the rodeo in Nalene this afternoon. The Double Deuce has its own box for our guests. You'll be very comfortable with us, and no one should leave our West without seeing a rodeo."

"That's very kind of you." He would rather have said no; his mind was still occupied with the Orient he had flown away from such a short time ago. The friend he had come to see had gone to Mexico, and he had come to the ranch to rest. But the drive in the Howard Canyon Stage had not tired him. Moreover, even the forced solicitude of the hostess leading him to a table filled with other guests did something to relieve the loneliness closing in on him.

He didn't know for a moment whom she was talking about when she introduced him, but before the mispronunciation had died away, she asked him if that was the way he pronounced his name.

"Who's Who says he's an architect," she said with a scholarly smile, and with that information continued around the table.

A man named Sand and his wife were immediately across the table from the place he stood. Sand was a contractor from Rhode Island and looked disturbingly like a Koala bear.

He sprang up and leaned across the table to shake Ohnmachtig's hand, holding against his stomach with the other hand the napkin he had tucked in the front of his shirt. Sand and his wife were dressed alike in shirts and trousers of green wool. Mr. Bennett and a nervous, emaciated woman who may have been his wife were seated to the left of Sand. Mrs. Larmacher said Bennett was a motion picture actor, but Ohnmachtig could not recognize him.

He did recognize the Count and Countess von Schlicht after his introduction to them, but only from newspaper pictures. The Countess did not reply to the introduction, but the Count, scenting a countryman, rose, bowed, and shook hands. The architect was seated next to the Count, and, to open the conversation, remarked that he had met the Count's elder brother at Bayreuth in 1932. It seemed to him that the brother held the title then, but had been killed in Poland during the invasion.

"Ah, Ferdinand," said the Count, shaking his head, "Er war so jung, eine Jahr alter nur."

"So many died, young and old," Ohnmachtig said, wondering if the Count's grief were genuine.

"Aber ein Ferdinand, ein Bruder."

The Countess looked at them when they spoke. She might have been annoyed, but all the architect saw when she turned her head were circles of enigmatic glass. She

was one of the richest women in the world; the fact he knew that she had purchased the Count and his title as one might buy an old chateau, and that he was certain the Count would know he knew, made him a little uncomfortable. He was not concerned about the Countess; she was apparently listening to nothing anyone said and was probably impervious to insult in any case. But somehow the impoverished nobility of the Count was a thing he wanted not to hurt.

His deliberation over a suitably innocuous topic for conversation was interrupted by the Countess. She announced loudly that she was not going to the rodeo. She was talking to no one in particular, and despite the loudness of her voice, it was apparent that no one had heard.

"My wife says that she is not going to attend the rodeo this afternoon," the Count offered quickly.

"Merci, ma cher," the Countess muttered as conversation resumed around the table. She wore a turtle neck sweater of cashmere, pink in color, with a black riding jacket with tan jodhpurs. Her hair was knotted in a chignon and was blond, though Ohnmachtig wanted to remember her from her pictures as a brunette. She was an indeterminate age, but he imagined she had passed forty. The Count wore a dark green Bavarian jacket with a white silk shirt and orange Ascot scarf. He ate everything put before him with good appetite, though from his hollow cheeks and general leanness Ohnmachtig would have thought him a man to whom

food meant nothing. From a bowl of glutinous stuff which was the Countess' only course she took a spoonful listlessly from time to time.

Immediately across sat Dr. Jensen, a dentist from the same town as the contractor Sand, Jensen's wife, and his two daughters, aged ten and twelve; all were fair, well-mannered, and brilliant of smile. To the right of them were the Misses Scudder, proprietresses of an importing firm and gift shop in a suburb of Boston. At one end of the table was an advertising agency lawyer, who, the Count whispered in German to Ohnmachtig, was an expert on Spinoza whose wife had left him, though the conditions were not cause and effect so far as the Count knew. At the other end sat Mr. Drinkwater, president of something which Ohnmachtig thought Mrs. Larmacher had called the Drinkwater Fitting Corporation, whose wife was ill. President Drinkwater, a handsome man of sixty-five with snow white hair, shouted down the table to the lawyer a tale of political woe; the wrong party had taken control of his state, and he said if his peers didn't have sense enough to change things soon, he would quit business in a huff and throw many of those peers out of work. A couple whom Sand introduced as the Wimples came in and sat on Drinkwater's right. Wimple seemed to spend much of his time out of doors, for his face was tanned by sun and wind. His wife

was a head taller and also looked weathered. Wimple at once struck up a conversation with Dr. Jensen about the problems of transporting horses long distances.

During desert, Mrs. Larmacher appeared from the kitchen rapping on a milk bottle for attention. She had changed her cotton dress for a flannel shirt and a pair of black trousers.

"May I have your attention, please?" she called in a voice of surprising strength. "Our cars will leave from the porch of the recreation hall at one o'clock. We hate to rush, but the rodeo begins at half past two. Just come in whatever you have on. This is the West, and we don't believe in putting on the dog out here. The idiom rather repelled him, but he smiled with the rest.

"Je ne vais pas, cher," the Countess mumbled.

"Of course, dear," the Count replied without looking at her, "of course not."

CHAPTER II

To Ohnmachtig's surprise, Mrs. Larmacher's daughter Lorraine was a tall girl whose red hair hung to her shoulders, blew back in the wind, swayed like a cape with the rhythm of her walking. She was to be the driver of the car to which he was assigned for the journey to the rodeo. Her mother, whom the girl appeared hardly to be aware of, sat stiffly in the front seat beside her daughter while Lorraine guided the sedan masterfully and at great speed along the highway, around abrupt corners and shallow rises, following the contours of the canyon. Ohnmachtig and the Scudder sisters were together in the back seat. "Have you been to the Continent recently?" one of the sisters asked him as he put a match to her cigarette.

The Scudder sisters had gone regularly to Wiesbaden before the war. They had tried the place twice since the war, but they told him in their broad, identical voices that the atmosphere at the Kurhaus was hardly the same. He supposed they were right.

"I am almost certain that things will get better," Miss Lotus Scudder said. "Things can't be scarce forever, now can they?" An expression of doubt came into her mild

eyes. Her sister was looking out the window at the river that rushed along below the road. They were both near fifty, though he could not tell which was older. "You don't think anything dreadful will happen again? Do you?" She seemed quite anxious. Genevieve interrupted to reassure her sister. "We just got through with one war, dear. What in Heaven's name would we want with another?"

"It's not a matter of what we want, dear. It's what happens. Just what happens." Her eyelids fluttered nervously as she looked at Ohnmachtig.

"Now," said her sister with a laugh.

"Why, it wouldn't surprise me if there was another one that would keep us from even coming here!" She pursed her lips in indignation.

"We'd all be in the same boat then, wouldn't we?" She patted her sister's hand. "Things will be all right in Wiesbaden, and here too. Don't you think so Mr. Ohnmachtig?"

He did not think so, but he said, "I am sure they will. And even if not, there will be spas somewhere in the worst of times." The sound of their voices comforted him, the more so perhaps because what they said amounted to nonsense.

The ride lasted little more than an hour. As they approached Nalene, they saw a cloud of dust at its left outskirts which Mrs. Larmacher said was their destination,

the fairgrounds. In the dust, banners and flags hung dispiritedly in the windless heat. As he looked from the window of the car at the site of the celebration, the spectacle was more ominous than joyful. The sunlight through the dust was too unrelenting, the noise was strident, almost hysterical. But as Lorraine Larmacher stopped the car in a field of yellow weeds, he got out to join the melee.

"There's Eddie Gibbons," he heard Lorraine say. "Just a minute, I want to talk to her." He turned to see a girl riding a running horse toward them. Mrs. Larmacher looked after her daughter impatiently.

"I'm sure," she said with a strained smile, "that she won't take a minute." The girl reined in her horse and exchanged greetings with Lorraine. They stood waiting awkwardly while the girls chatted. Another car pulled in next to theirs, and the girl's horse shied. "There!" cried Lotus Scudder shrilly, as if she had seen something she had been looking for. The girl called Eddie shouted at the dancing horse. It reared and she struck it on the side of the head with a fist. The horse turned, and with a kick of her spurs she sent it running through the dust toward the arena.

They walked then into the crowd, which seemed to be bound not toward the arena, but to be wandering aimlessly

back and forth. Loudspeakers hung from poles at every hand and growled and screamed through the dusty air the sounds of trumpets and drums. "Here now, help a veteran, folks!" shouted a brown-faced man with no teeth, pacing back and forth in front of a display of small American flags on pins. A panting man wearing a blue military cap bent down to confront a boy in a cowboy suit, who was crying. "Now what?" asked the man. "Now what?" The trumpets and drum roared tremendously and were succeeded by the sound of a phonograph needle as tall as the grandstand rushing along in a groove as big as a river. Packs of boys in tennis shoes and baseball caps crawled under the bleachers and dragged burlap sacks full of bottles after them, shouting deliriously.

"We sit <u>en sombre</u>, eh?" Ohnmachtig said to Lotus Scudder as they all took seats in a brightly canopied box along the outer edge of the grandstand. She smiled blankly at him. "That is," he explained as he helped her seat herself, "those who attend bullfights sit either in the hot sun, <u>en sol</u>, or in the shade, <u>en sombre</u>."

"My sister cares for that sort of thing. She went to a bullfight in Mexico two years ago. I stayed in California." The smile became one of tolerance.

The carnival atmosphere so broadly advertised in music and banners found little adjunct in the mood of the

crowd. From his seat in the shaded box Ohnmachtig had a sudden intuition of hot boredom in the bleachers below; and when a fat woman in a dress printed with blue leaves reached up a red hand to drag a fidgeting boy to his seat, he had approved of her short temper. The members of the crowd endured the heat and the noise, ignored the banners, the music, and one another. They are here, he thought, because they do not want to miss anything, and I am here for the same reason, searching for something new or at least something bearable in the bitter lees and sediments. His seat was at the edge of the box, so he leaned away from the merriment there and as the rodeo began, and progressed, became absorbed in it.

Contests in the arena alternated with stunts of one kind and another. Only the contest really held his interest. He understood little of what was going on, but he felt in the spectacle below a complete involvement, a harmonic concentration on the business at hand. In the instant before something happened, the arena became a waxworks; cowboys leaned on fences, lit cigarettes, or bent over to pick up saddles, but for an instant there was no motion. Then the action itself was born completely, and life began again. It took many strange forms. From a gate in the network of logs that described the arena, a calf ran out in infant panic pursued by a man on a clever horse. The

man bent forward in perfect concentration, waving a rope over his head until he threw its loop over the neck of the calf, vaulted to the ground, and in a few seconds had three legs of the calf tied. In another event, another man--it might even have been the same one, he could not tell--appeared riding a berserk horse, the man's body thrown back and forth with the furious motions of the horse as if the body were made of rags. A cowboy leaned slowly from the saddle of his running horse to take hold of the horns of a running steer kept in line by a second man on horseback; and in an instant the man and steer were left alone, the horses and second man gone across the arena. The man strained at the steer's stubbornness to twist the animal's sullen head around until they were almost eye to eye, understanding one another completely, or so he thought, the steer planting its front legs wide apart to meet danger standing as instinct told it to, as its kind must do. Usually the man won, and sometimes the steer lay in the dust after it had been thrown, convinced, he thought, that the end had come when it lost its footing.

Ohnmachtig did not know how long he stared obliviously at men battling animals, but somehow at peace with them. At length, he shook his head to break the trance, took off his glasses, and rubbed his eyes. After he put his glasses back on, Lotus Scudder spoke to him.

"You looked so fascinated with the rodeo that I didn't want to bother. But I wonder, could you help me keep score? Genevieve is so busy with her binoculars." He did not know score was being kept, but he said he would help. He was even grateful for something to break up his preoccupation.

The scorekeeping was done with the aid of Genevieve Scudder, however. For those events which involved riding, she made her judgment through the binoculars, according a maximum of ten points for a perfect ride. The announcer on the public address system called out the times for those events run against a watch, and Ohnmachtig and Lotus Scudder checked with Genevieve to make certain they had heard correctly.

The last event of the rodeo was the riding of Brahma bulls. "They're crosses between Indian sacred cows and Mexican fighting bulls," Lotus Scudder told him.

"There's not much point in their being here if they are of Brahmin temperament," he said pointedly.

Lotus apparently could not make the Emersonian connection. She looked at him as though he had spoken to her in a foreign language.

"Their temperament is fine," she said, looking intently at the arena.

It took some minutes to clear the arena of the first bull. The animal wore a cowbell on a rope around its belly,

which rang each time it whirled around. He could see little trace of the Mexican parent in the bull.

"Watch the clowns," Genevieve told him, pointing to the arena with her binoculars. She leaned across her sister to explain to him that the clowns were in the arena to distract the bulls away from fallen riders. In the bright sun of the arena a bull chased a clown, who leaped into a barrel padded with automobile tires stretched around its middle circumference. The clown wore oversized bib overalls, which he left behind as he jumped into the barrel. Once inside, he taunted the bull to charge, but the bull could not be persuaded to hook the barrel, to the disappointment of the crowd. He found himself wanting the bull to come to the clown's rescue by charging, but the animal prefered to paw the dust, lower his head, and snort.

The next two bulls were ridden and disposed of without incident. During the third ride, he dropped his program, and as he felt for it, he heard the crowd gasp. He saw the fallen rider. The bull, still bucking, turned and hit the rider just as he was getting up from the dust. The clowns rushed in, waving their tattered capes. With the fallen rider lying under the bell on its belly, the bull stood motionless and looked stupidly at the cavorting clowns. Then one of the clowns rushed in and slapped the bull's nose with his cape, which brought the bull forward after him.

The rider was out of danger.

The bull was enticed from the arena by two steers. Ohnmachtig looked down and saw the rider was still on the ground. Blood covered his face, and there was a huge stain on his shirt. He thought of a picture he had seen once of an unsuccessful assassin surrounded by police. The rider was taken away in an ambulance, which blew its siren as it raced across the empty arena.

Not long after, the rodeo ended. The crowd, emptied of excitement, marched at half-step through the gates, disarrayed and sweating. He waited in the box with the others, and as he did, a longing to go with the mob came over him, coupled with a feeling of despair and confusion. He took hold of the railing and sat down.

"Too much excitement, perhaps," he said weakly when Mrs. Larmacher asked him what was the matter. But he knew the confused longing again as he and the others walked silently the way the crowd had gone, through the dust and litter of their passing.

That evening after dinner, he sat on the porch of his cabin and stared at the big meadow between the ranch and the barns. Along one edge, Lorraine Larmacher was leading a horse the color of her hair. At the other, the heiress from South Carolina walked slowly through the grass. Neither seemed to be aware of the other's presence, and as he watched them both out of sight, he was for the moment quite content again to be alone.

CHAPTER III

The second night of his stay at the ranch, he found himself at a dance. About ten-thirty at night, he had taken a walk which brought him to the dining hall. Mac was driving some of the guests to what he called a "mountain roadhouse" for an hour or two of dancing and drinking. Ohnmachtig was invited to come, and though he had no intention of dancing and little of drinking, he went.

Their destination was The Corral, a building with a bar at one end, a dance floor in the middle, and a bandstand at the other end. Naked bulbs shone on varnished logs that reminded Ohnmachtig of his cabin at the ranch. The place was full of smoke and music, the latter from an orchestra of cowboys he could barely see at the far end.

Mrs. Larmacher was moving through the crowd with a bottle of Coca-Cola in her hand. She smiled a greeting to him as he came in with the party and Mac. He stood for a moment by the door, not knowing what to do. Then he went to the bar, and after he caught the bartender's attention, ordered a highball which he did not intend to drink. The crush was at once a solace and an irritation to him; he was isolated from the shouts and laughter, from the familiarity of elbows and legs touching him. He had removed him-

self from the possibility of joining in such celebrations because he knew, and knew he could never forget, that he would only make a fool of himself. It was the very nearness of the people he could not reach that gave him comfort, for if he could not join them, he felt at least he was not rejected. Someone was speaking to him.

"I beg your pardon?" he said, turning. The face seemed at once familiar and strange to the architect. The man was almost half a head taller even without the broad-brimmed hat. His brows were heavy, almost menacing, but when Ohnmachtig saw the man's eyes he did not find the powerful look he had expected. Instead, the man's eyes were full of a kind of apology.

"I said, are you the architect?" His voice, quiet and tentative, sounded misplaced against the roar of the crowd. "I can't say the name they give me."

"Yes, but I don't--"

"I want--" the other said, but the orchestra climbed to a climax of sorrow and his words were lost, his lips moving in pantomime.

"I'm sorry," the architect began. He could not understand what the man wanted with him as an architect.

"A house," the man said without changing the bland expression on his round face. "They said you was an architect." He might have said more, but the music grew louder again and Ohnmachtig could not tell.

"There's so much noise," the architect said, but from the expression on the other's face, he judged he hadn't been heard.

"I'll pay what it costs. That don't matter." He stood motionless in his gray overcoat while men and women eddied around him. Their eyes met for an moment, then each looked away in embarrassment at the misunderstanding. Fortunately, the music stopped and Ohnmachtig could say, "I'm sorry, but I haven't been able to hear what you've been saying. My name is Robert Ohnmachtig."

The other looked like a man who had blurted out a difficult thing too rapidly, and against his relief at being done with it, had to go over it again. "There's a lot of noise in here. My name is Luther Gibbons. I'm a rancher. Pleased to meet you." He rubbed a blunt finger along his nose.

"It's my pleasure." Ohnmachtig tried to remember why the name was familiar.

"The lady from the Double Deuce, I forgot her name, said you was an architect."

"Mrs. Larmacher?"

"That's right. She told me your name, but I can't say it."

"Ohnmachtig. It gives many people difficulty." Again he felt that the rancher was both strange and familiar;

it was as though he were looking down at the man from some height. The illusory distance blurred Gibbons' features until he felt as if he were seeing a composite face in a dream. Unimportant but remembered faces from his past merged into the solid, ruddy features before him, and as he saw the face clearly again, he felt as though he should greet him as a long absent friend.

"I want you to draw up the plans for a house on my place." The rancher put one big hand on the bar and leaned.

"You want me to do this?" He was not certain he had understood.

"A big house. I'll pay you what it costs. You don't have to worry about that." Gibbons' voice lacked the inflections of persuasion, but the request was not made rudely. It was made matter-of-factly, as though the time and place were completely appropriate.

"No, that is not it at all. The truth of the matter is that I'm on a vacation." He had to say something to the man, and as impossible as the request was, he did not want to be discourteous.

Gibbons pushed his hat back on his high forehead. "It's nothing so hasty that it can't wait till you're done with your vacation. Time enough then."

"There's something else too. You see, I'm not what you would call a practicing architect."

"You mean you ain't got a license?"

Ohnmachtig laughed. "No, but I don't blame you for wondering. I have all the documents, but the matter of practising and non-practising--" he broke off, realizing that what he wanted to say not only would make little sense to the rancher, but made little sense to himself. "What I should say is that I don't do much commission work any longer."

"You retired then? You don't look old enough for that," Gibbons said in his monotone. It was apparent to the architect that no subtle explanation would serve, and he was beginning to enjoy being cornered.

"No, I'm not retired. Rather I should say--" he broke off again and laughed. "Come have a drink with me, and maybe I can say what I mean."

There were no stools so they stood elbow to elbow. Gibbons ordered beer. "Now what I mean is that I haven't actually worked for about two years," he told the rancher. "You've heard probably of a gentleman farmer. One might say that I was a gentleman architect."

"You mean it's sort of a hobby with you?" He lifted the bottle of beer and drained it without waiting for an answer. Ohnmachtig waited until he was through.

"No, it's my profession." Ohnmachtig continued to enjoy the rancher's questions.

"Well, if you don't work at it, how come you call it

your profession?" His manner was patient, as though he were certain he would understand if he persevered.

The impeachment in the question was genuine enough to be uncomfortable for the architect, yet he admired the other's directness. "Let's say I have been an architect. Aren't there architects in Nalene who could do the work for you?"

"There's a couple of them there," Gibbons said, "but I always feel like they want to sell me something." He looked at the floor. "I can't even talk to them. I don't know. I guess it don't matter one way or the other."

Along the bar a woman was quarreling drunkenly with the bartender. "I'll tell you when I've had enough," she said loudly, "then you tell me if I'm right, okay?" The architect recognized her as the girl with the skittish horse he had seen at the rodeo, and remembered that her name was Gibbons.

"That sounds like my sister," Gibbons said without seeming disturbed. "She drinks too much."

"If you like, you may visit me at the Double Deuce Ranch. We can talk your idea through, and see if I can be of help." Ohnmachtig regretted that he had no intention of doing what Gibbons asked, but the hope he offered was tentative and his eventual refusal would not be too serious an hypocrisy. He wanted to talk with the rancher again.

Gibbons frowned slightly as if he were thinking over the architect's invitation. When a bottle broke behind Ohnmachtig, the rancher took his hands from his pockets and moved past the smaller man. "I'll come and see you," he said over his shoulder.

Gibbons pushed through the crowd to his sister, who had pillowed her head in her arms on the bar beside the broken bottle. "Come on, Eddie," he said, sounding as though he did not care whether she came or not. The architect could not hear what she said to her brother, but he saw her get up from her stool, Gibbons' hand supporting her under the arm. The two of them had their backs toward Ohnmachtig as they went out, Gibbons a sombre, purposeful figure, towering a foot above the blond girl, the man in his gray coat and broad dark hat, the girl in a leather jacket dyed green and trimmed with multi-colored fringe.

When the door closed behind the pair, Ohnmachtig turned to the bar. It seemed to him as though the rancher and his sister had never existed; moreover, that the events of the rodeo the day before had never happened. He felt as if it were all a kind of a play, an aimless, accidental sort of drama staged not for his sake, but in spite of him, and that the persons of the drama, the people at the ranch he had met and talked with, were phantoms which occupied no space in the real world, whatever and wherever that was,

but only existed as acts of his own imagination. From this illusion the rancher separated himself as a figure too substantial for the ghostly world of the architect's prosecenium. "If you don't work at it, how come you call it your profession?" he heard the rancher saying. In the mirror across the bar, Ohnmachtig could see the smile on his own face.

He drank the highball he had not intended to drink. Mac was taking some of the guests back to the ranch, so Ohnmachtig left with them. Mac drove to the door of the architect's cabin, and in the beam of the car's headlights, he mounted to the porch and went inside. Someone had lighted his lamps for him.

Because his mind was not ready for sleep, he sat for a time staring at the wall. Then he rose, went to the door and felt his way along the porch. He found a chair and slid into it. The moon was perceptible to him only as a faint yellow stain on the perfect blackness, and the sounds of the night, the rustlings, sighs, and songs, were a comfort. He was aware of them for a while, and then he knew nothing until he opened his eyes and saw that it was dawn. The meadow beyond the little steam that bounded it was not in sunlight yet, but across the full width of the valley the early light fell gently on banks of fir trees. He smelled the morning, tasted its dampness, felt its cold

in his bones. He wondered, as he got up painfully from the chair, what it would be like to have no senses at all.

CHAPTER IV

Two days later, Ohnmachtig sat after the noon meal on the porch of the dining hall with Mr. and Mrs. Wimple. He was there for two reasons: first, he had never talked with an evangelist minister, which Wimple was; and second, Wimple, for all his shortcomings, was better than no company at all. "I got the call, my friend," Wimple had said to the architect at breakfast the day before, "when I was taken up with the sinful, unthinking life, training race horses in the daytime and playing the fiddle in honky-tonk joints at night." The minister's speech had a flat, nasal accent which Ohnmachtig identified as the speech of an Oklahoman or a Texan.

The architect had spent the two days quietly, walking in the woods during the day and sitting in his cabin at night. The rancher had not turned up yet, and among the guests he had found no one whose company he wanted to seek out. The Count was too taken with attending his wife to have time for the architect; and Ohnmachtig felt that his presence, as a person who knew Europe and its vanishing nobility, was uncomfortable to the Count.

The conversation on the porch was failing. Ohnmachtig remembered the remark about the minister's musical history

and said that he himself was studying the viola.

"I don't play the fiddle," Wimple said earnestly, "since I come to the ministry. I leave that to those who have less work to do." He made geometric patterns in the air with his thin brown hands as he talked. "And music, my friend, can be one of the disguises of Satan himself."

"I have heard," the architect said to keep things moving, "that Martin Luther said he saw no reason why the devil should have all the good tunes."

The appeal to authority had little effect. "The devil is wise in the ways of the world," Wimple said.

"Music is for those who aren't taken up all the time with God's work," Mrs. Wimple joined in. She spoke, however, to her husband, not to the architect. She seldom spoke directly to anyone but her husband. Though she was just slightly above medium height, her husband came only to her shoulder when they stood together. Ohnmachtig wondered if Wimple had been a jockey rather than a trainer.

Grebber joined them on the porch. He was the lawyer who Count von Schlicht had said was an expert on Spinoza. Ohnmachtig found out that Grebber knew who Spinoza was, but the architect was afraid that further discussion of the philosopher would have been embarrassing to both of them. Grebber did not like the Wimples. "They want to be horsey and Christy at the same time" he had said to the architect

after dinner the night before. "Horse liniment and holy water don't mix, at least not for him. He's just an Okie who's run onto a good thing." Ohnmachtig had to agree, although Grebber's cynical manner made his judgement seem harsh and oversimple.

"I believe in music for the congregation, oh very much," Wimple was saying earnestly. "For our worship we have a gospel band to play with the singing of hymns, supported by the free-will offerings of the folk that worship with us." His close-set eyes, the color of mud, still followed the patterns he traced in the air.

"Good afternoon, Wimple, Mrs. Wimple," the lawyer said with hollow heartiness, "Good afternoon, Ohnmachtig." Grabber smoked pipes carved in the shapes of heads: an Indian, a monk, a skull. Ohnmachtig noticed that it was a witch this afternoon, with wild briar locks and red jewels for eyes. The men returned Grebber's greeting, but Mrs. Wimple sat silently and rocked.

"Any of you planning to quit our civilization here and ride up Blackman Canyon this afternoon?" Grebber asked.

"No," Wimple said, as if he were flattered to find someone interested in his plans, "my wife and I are planning to take our horses over the jumps at the lower end of the pasture. They're too expensive to ride in the mountains." Ohnmachtig said he didn't think he would go, and the lawyer

walked down the porch stairs.

"Good luck all," he said. "And take care of those horses, Wimple. You'd have to work a long time to buy another pair."

"Don't worry. We've been on horses all our life," Wimple called happily, missing the thrust. Mrs. Wimple muttered something under her breath.

The minister leaned back in his chair and looked pensive. "I have thought, Mr. Ohnmachtig, that I might soon join the Reformed Denomination. They have a man who writes in the magazines and is an author of books. I read every word he writes."

"Every week in the magazines and every day in the papers, Reverend Wimple," the woman said.

"I am not a man who believes in denominations, for didn't Christ Jesus found one church only?" he went on. "But for us common folk their man has an understanding voice for our problems to believe as Christ Jesus taught the common folk to believe."

"He is probably very successful." Ohnmachtig heard a fly buzz past his head. The summer air lay still in the hot sun.

"Oh, he is more than successful, for as it says the things of this world are as dust to the world to come. He speaks the word of Christ Jesus to ordinary, everyday folk

in their everyday living, not just for worship on Sundays. Like the Testament says in Act XX, 19; do you recollect that scripture?"

"No, I'm afraid not." Ohnmachtig imagined that Wimple was about to speak to him in a language he would not be able to understand.

"'Serving the Lord with all humility of mind,' says The Acts of the Apostles, Chapter Twenty, Verse Nineteen, 'and with many tears and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews.'" He waved a thin hand in the air. "That's the Apostle Paul talking."

"Here comes the boy with our horses," Mrs. Wimple said, getting up quickly from her chair.

"Think of that verse, my friend," Wimple said as he passed by Ohnmachtig's chair. Wimple and his wife were dressed alike in gabardine trousers and green turtle neck sweaters, despite the heat. They walked down the stairs and to their horses, Wimple taking two steps to his wife's one. They waved and were off. The fly buzzed around the architect's head again, and he slapped at it listlessly. After a few minutes of sitting alone, he got up and walked through dry weeds toward the hills which flanked the mouth of Blackman's Canyon.

The attempt to evaluate oneself all at once, to assess the point and progress of one's life, mind, and habits was something he had not done for many years, but

as he walked that afternoon he reviewed himself. He did not regret that he held fate--his own individual destiny and the destiny of the world at large--in something like disrespect, which let him live without the nagging of ambition. When he was young, he dreamed of fame and mused about the company of the great, impatient for the time when his accomplishments would give him the former and admit him to the latter. He preferred not to be alone and would even restlessly seek out companions he did not particularly like to satisfy his hunger for talking and listening.

After his father died, his new freedom let him discover the delights of being alone. He travelled, and the longing for fame faded like a road in the distance to a traveller looking back. He had had mistresses, but when he summed things up he felt he had been in love just twice. Once he had loved a dark Austrian girl to whom he became engaged. One day she failed to keep an appointment with him. That evening, he searched everywhere for her, and the next morning he called the police. She had vanished. A month later she wrote him a letter from Russia, which he did not answer. The delight of being alone had become the power to be alone, and though he thought of her from time to time, the name Ingeborg was one he could hear without involuntarily thinking of the girl he had loved. The second woman was the wife of a friend, to whom he had never declared himself.

Almost before he knew it, his was a life that did not include the love of a woman. He had the time and desire to find love, but the thing he expected--the kind of relationship he would have had to have--eluded him. From his relationships with his mistresses he did not expect love and after a time he ceased to hope for it there. During the last two years, sudden frights seized him that he would go to his grave unloved and unloving; the fears were as sharp as premonitions of death itself.

As an artist, he acknowledged to himself and to others that, in effect, he had produced nothing. He wrote in his journals that at times he felt like a William of Sens set down in the twentieth century, that he was certain he could have designed and built a Gothic cathedral. At the same time he recognized that he was too fond of the past. Medieval and renaissance Europe were familiar places to him; he imagined he could walk the streets of the cities of Europe in those eras and be surprised at nothing. Nevertheless, he considered his antiquarianism a fault, though one which he would do nothing to correct. He had nothing to offer in place of the works of his contemporaries which he found distasteful to him, so he remained at the periphery of the greatest of the fine arts.

Despite his resolve to stand apart from architecture in his own age, he was sought out as a consultant because

of his through knowledge of design and construction. During the war years he had done some work as a naval architect, his poor eyesight keeping him from military service. He had been a member of a naval commission which had gone to Japan shortly after surrender to make a survey of the progress of Japanese naval architecture. The buildings of Japan were a joy to him, and he had gone back to see them again. He was passing through the United States to settle business affairs before he returned to Europe.

However, travel now meant less and less to him as he rushed from continent to continent alone. He had begun to feel like a gadfly, not the Socratean sort, rather a purposeless insect at the mercy of prevailing winds. Travel seemed more frequently an unsuccessful scheme for putting off the future to which he could not resign himself. In certain moods he thought resignation the greatest of all the virtues; at other times, he wanted to rush at what was left of life as though it were a body of water and he a swimmer determined to cross it in triumph or sink.

His thoughts were in a limbo between those extremes of peace and war when he ended his afternoon walk on a rocky seat atop the north wall of the mouth of Blackman Canyon. The party of guests were riding back from their excursion and he gazed at them below. As he watched, a large bird flew soundlessly over the opposite wall of the canyon. He assumed it must be an eagle, or at any rate, a large hawk.

It hung there as if it were searching for something, and then so suddenly that the act seemed involuntary, the bird dropped along the wall into the canyon above the heads of the riders. They were tired and rode staring ahead or at the ground and did not see the swooping bird, or if they saw, paid no attention. With a shrug of its wings, the bird drifted up Ohnmachtig's wall of the canyon. Although he sat still, it swerved away from him before it got really close and changed its trajectory to fly up the canyon almost as though it had rebounded from a wall. He could not tell whether it had been an eagle or a hawk, or even how large it was.

It would be dinnertime when he got back; the bell on the dining hall called unmelodiously as he climbed down the shallow slope of the canyon mouth facing the ranch. He did not try to account for the fact that he looked forward to the meal with an eagerness out of proportion to his hunger and his feelings about his fellow guests; his was a sense of spontaneous prospect he had known as a child, he was as excited as if he were flying with the grace and ease of the lonely bird. As he walked along the worn path toward the busy dining hall, he would have said yes enthusiastically to the bashful rancher with the drunken sister, who wanted him to design a house. He was at the edge of his isolation, faced away from the depths of it,

ready to take a step forward. His exhilaration lasted until he had stood for several minutes on the porch of the dining hall among his fellow guests. There was no way to turn what he felt into words; unspoken, it fell away as he made and received stale sounds of greeting among persons who have nothing to say to one another.

CHAPTER V

Luther Gibbons resented habits in those he knew, and even in those he did not know. This was an underground resentment, and as was the case with most of his likes and dislikes, was apparent only to those who knew him well. He was seldom at ease in dealing with others, and often when he had personal traffic with the ranch hands, or sometimes with members of his family, he felt as if he were meeting the other person for the first time. Habits he thought of as personal shortcuts which had been denied him.

"Don't you remember?" his wife asked him after he wondered at the breakfast table why she went to Nalene every Thursday.

"'Why?' I said." He had finished his coffee and held the cup cradled in his big hands.

"What kind of a question is that?" she wanted to know. "The girls meet Thursday, so I go Thursday."

Marjorie Gibbons cleaned, trimmed, and painted her fingernails every morning at breakfast. Now it was summer time and she also painted her toenails at the table, though she cleaned them elsewhere. He did not know where.

Gibbons and his wife faced each other across the broad table in the breakfast kitchen, a minor dining room

with bare white walls, located off the kitchen of the old house. "Why does it have to be Thursday every week?" He stood and looked down at her dark hair. He was a little bit irritated, but his voice did not betray the fact as he asked her questions in a flat, dispassionate way. She would know the extent of his irritation, and would pay little attention to it.

She concentrated on painting a toenail now, her foot propped on a chair next to her own. "If it wasn't Thursday, it would be some other day. We have to meet the same day every week, so we'll know what day to come."

Gibbons drew his brows together as he looked down at his wife. "Your feet aren't very big," he said. He often saw commonplace things in different relationships to other things, in this case his wife's foot on the broad seat of a chair.

"Thank you," she murmured without looking up. She and Luther had met while she was a student at the college in Nalene. He was a home-town playboy who drove a big roadster. Silently he had courted her, and after a year or so, their future marriage was taken for granted by both of them. Once created, the marriage got along on some affection and a great deal of inertia.

"When did Eddie get in this morning?" She looked up at his bulk. "Did you bring her in?" He watched her look

away from him, lean back, and admire her painted nails. Because he knew she did not expect an answer, he walked out of the room, his boots banging on the floor.

He had to go out anyway to see if he could catch his brother Amos before Amos left. However, as Gibbons walked under the wooden canopy that connected the south porch of the house with the carriage shed, he could see the tail of dust left by what he knew was his brother's car racing east towards Lemington. Amos would be back soon enough, and if he was going to Lemington, he would not need a rifle to use on the coyote that one of the ranch hands had seen. By the time Luther had taken a rifle from a pickup in the carriage shed, the dust was gone and he had forgotten his brother. Looking straight ahead, he climbed the hill to the west of the house. A higher system of hills, not visible from the ranch house, rose above the most immediate hill, and he circled one of these higher hills. He stopped now and then to see from which direction the wind was blowing.

At length, he walked almost to the edge of a bluff, then crawled awkwardly to its brink. Below was a pond fed by a spring, hidden from the light wind, still and clear. There was nothing stirring, but as he lay there with the rifle in front of him, a jackrabbit came in starts from the brush to drink. He shot it.

Almost before the sound had fallen away in echoes, he rose and climbed down. The rabbit's blood turned a shallow plate of water red along the bank. In the water he saw reflected the peaks of the Crazy Mountains. He remembered, but not vividly, that his father had told him that when a person stood on these hills in back of the ranch house, the only land he could see that the ranch did not own or lease was the mountain range itself.

The memory he accepted indifferently, but the image of the mountains, colored like lead in the water, made him uneasy. He fired the rifle into the water. The ripples made the image of the mountains dance. He threw a stone the size of his head into the pond, and it calmed him to see the mountains and the sky break into fragments of disconnected color.

CHAPTER VI

As Luther Gibbons left, his place at the table in the breakfast kitchen was taken by his sister Edna, wearing a house coat of turquoise-colored satin embroidered with pink flowers. She slumped into the chair, squinting her eyes against the scalding white refelctions of the morning sun from the painted walls. On the table was a coffee cup, which she picked up to drink from; when she saw it was empty, she tossed it across the big table in anger. It fell to the floor with a sharp sound. She heard her sister-in-law's voice.

"Marge!" she called, then put her head in her arms.

In a moment, Marjorie Gibbons appeared from the kitchen with a cup of coffee in one hand and a glass of effervescent liquid in the other. "Good morning, Edna," she said brightly as she put the cup and the glass on the table.

The other raised her head, took the glass in her hand, and despite her shakiness drank it down. "That's better," she said without conviction.

Marjorie put her freshly manicured hand on the girl's shoulder. "Shall I tell Mrs. Laird to fix you something to eat?"

Edna cleared her throat in disgust. "Did Luther bring me home last night?"

The older woman nodded her head. She did not know whether Luther had brought his sister home or not, but she did not wish to admit she did not know. The behavior of Luther's sister was an irritation Marjorie Gibbons tried to turn into a contrasting background for her own accomplishments. She did not actively dislike Eddie. When the two were alone, she was quite considerate of the younger woman's feelings. Though she felt some sort of responsibility for Eddie, and was in fact the wife of the girl's guardian, she despaired of getting the girl to change her habits. Cheerfully she administered bromides for Eddie's hangovers, a job to which her conscience pricked her, and which was quite intimate enough.

Marjorie Gibbons, aged thirty-four, was the elder daughter of a political family in the state capital. As far back as she could remember, her father--a round-faced Irishman who drank sweet wine in his basement and whose watch chain sagged with civic ornaments--had told her she would get what she wanted if she learned to make advantages of disadvantages. When she was younger, this concept fitted a great many things as she thought them over, but as she grew older, she thought things over less often (she had no gift of introspection) and had little need for the

the maxim. In Eddie's case, however, she made as much of it as she could.

Marjorie saw the coffee cup that her sister-in-law had thrown and returned it to the table. Eddie put a forefinger through the handle on the cup the other woman had brought her. She looked past Marjorie out the window. The hot wash of light outside hurt her eyes. The landscape she saw through the parted curtains was bleak and dry. She shuddered at it. She imagined she could walk along her line of sight forever and see nothing but sagebrush and yellow range grass.

The older woman's dark hair was carefully arranged. She pushed at it as she sat across from Eddie. "Is Bud home?" Eddie asked her.

"He just left. I think Mrs. Laird said he was going into Lemington." Marjorie was pleased every time her husband's brother left the ranch, no matter how near his destination or how short a time he stayed. Amos, or Bud, was a dark, coarse man several years younger than Luther, and so far as she was concerned, unlike her husband in every respect. Eddie looked more like Luther. She had light hair, almost blond, which was long and now hung in tatters. Her features, nose, cheekbones, and chin, were sharp, unlike either brother's, her mouth was small and tight, and her cheeks were unexpectedly heavy.

Eddie's mind was still on Bud. "I wanted him to ride me in to get my car." She looked up at the clock to see what time it was, but she could not focus her eyes on it. She was a useless prisoner of her hangover, and she hated her body for harboring such misery.

Shards of the night floated into her imagination. "I remember Luther now," she said to the other, "coming into The Corral, last night, this morning."

Marjorie patted the girl's hand absently, as she might have petted a dog. "Just walked in," Eddie remembered dully, "like he always does. I don't know what. I don't think I said anything to him. Maybe hello. Maybe I did when he took me home. I think he was talking to the gang from the Double Deuce."

Somewhere in the house, a door slammed. Eddie started at the sound, then returned to her coffee. "Does he come around looking for me?" she asked his wife. "I can't make it out, what he's up to. He doesn't drink enough to bother going in a place. Some nights he's there, some nights he's not. I wish he'd make up his mind. Maybe it keeps him busy, but I don't need him running along after me like a dog."

Eddie fell silent. Marjorie Gibbons took advantage of the lull to excuse herself. The blackness of the coffee the girl stared into was the color of the nights she fled through as both hunter and hunted. She laid her head in

her arms on the table, murmuring, "I sure as hell don't need his help."

Edna Gibbons had invoked the god of her independence before, had announced to anyone who had the smallest opportunity to stand in her way that she was perfectly free and would do just as she pleased. She sought out the company of men who wanted little to do with her, musicians in cowboy orchestras, ranch hands, truck drivers. If they showed signs of becoming attached to her, she dropped them, because she wanted no encumbrance of any sort. Some nights she would sit apart from the crowd in a noisy bar, sullen in the grip of some unspecified melancholy; if anyone tried to draw her out, she cursed him in anger, and if he persisted, she went somewhere else. Other nights she threw herself into the gaiety of a bar with an abandon that lasted well past midnight, after which she became belligerent. She lived solely for her nights in bars, good or bad. Her debauchery hid from her the passage of time; she was scarcely aware of the change of seasons; the first snow made her furious because she had not known it was imminent. Her room in the big ranch house looked as it had when she had been a high school girl except for a litter of prizes she had won on punchboards; bronzed statues of saddled horses two feet tall, plush pandas and teddy bears, fishing reels, elongated black ceramic panthers with planters in their backs, satin pillow covers printed

with roses and verses, gilded baroque clocks, tins of peanuts, huge solid belt buckles with a steer's head in bas-relief, tooled and tinted wallets and purses, barometers, bakelite ash trays with chromium horses rearing on their edges, heart shaped boxes of candy, small radio receivers with cases of ivory plastic, drinking glasses bearing decal nudes, cartons of shotgun shells, quarts of eau-de-cologne, bowling pin whiskey decanters, and so on. In the dark rain forest of her life, there was one thing that kept forcing its way to her attention as if it were an unrecognized growling in the underbrush. An old man in Lemington, a retired merchant seaman, had told her one night that there were only two places her life could lead her to: the foot of the cross or the muzzle end of a pistol. She hated him for his alternatives.

After her mother died, Edna had been reared by an aunt who lived in a small Wyoming town. One Saturday, the aunt became a Seventh Day Adventist under circumstances never explained to her relatives. Within a month, she had sent Edna, then twelve, to Welltown Academy, a school run by the church in a town to the south. Edna took things as they came; the escapes during spring, summer, and fall of the first year were exciting enough. Sometimes with a friend, and sometimes alone, she climbed to the conical roof of a water tower and laughed at the sleeping school

below. During the second summer, she was fourteen and always sneaked out alone. There was an Army Air Corps base nearby, and she found the company of young men from places she had never heard of a revelation. She became engaged to one after a simple ceremony in the back seat of a car. The engagement did not last, but the backseat did, and the next year she bought a ticket home. She had something in the way of a home then, since her brother and his wife were living at the ranch.

Luther did not seem surprised to see her, and listened with his chin in his hand to her complaints about the school. Marjorie Gibbons wrote a letter to the aunt, suggesting that it would be a good idea for Edna to go to school in Nalene and live at the ranch, of which she would get a share when she was twenty-five. The aunt protested, but Edna stayed.

She matriculated at Adams County High School, and was graduated without enthusiasm or difficulty a year and a half later. She drove her own car to school, and had little to do with students of rich parents, or any students, for that matter. She was used to older men.

An hour after she was graduated, she and a rodeo calfroper from Oklahoma were driving in her car to a little town at the edge of Yellowstone Park to be married. She had told a girlfriend what she was going to do; and when

Marjorie Gibbons missed her sister-in-law after the graduation ceremony, the girlfriend was questioned. She confessed her knowledge, and Marjorie told her husband. He looked as though he hadn't understood, but he led his wife to their car and drove not to the ranch, but toward the goal of the elopement. The bridal pair had stopped overnight along the way, so Marjorie Gibbons woke up the Justice of the Peace for nothing. The next morning the four of them met in the Justice's chambers. Luther, without prompting, said he didn't think the marriage was a good idea. The groom had not had much sleep, and he swore at them all. Gibbons paid little attention to the oaths, but the Justice of the Peace said any language like that had to be taken outside.

"I don't need your help," Eddie had said when she found Luther and his wife waiting for them. But she said nothing as they walked outside. The groom offered to fight Luther, and struck the first blow with a loud yell. He had told Eddie that he was part Cherokee Indian.

Luther held the calfroper away with one hand and knocked him down with the other. He was a big man, but he had to knock the smaller man down twice.

The women got into Luther's car, while the winner helped the double loser to his feet. The rancher gave the man money to go home, or wherever he wished. He wrote Edna a letter a week later from Spearfish, South Dakota, saying

he would send for her. His writing and spelling were so bad that she was never quite sure where he was going to send for her, but that was the last she heard. She had not cared particularly by the time she got home.

Gibbons did not try to manage his sister's affairs after that. "She's old enough to make her own fool out of herself," he said to his wife, "and I'm old enough not to make a fool out of me trying to stop her."

Eddie was finishing her coffee when Luther came into the breakfast kitchen, still carrying the rifle. He put the weapon against the wall and the cartridges on the window sill, glanced at Eddie without a greeting, and turned back to the window.

"I wanted Bud to go in with me and get my car. To The Corral," she said to him.

"Bud's gone to Lemington," he answered her.

"How about you?" She rubbed her head along the temple.

"I'll be pretty tied up." He could not bring himself to pay attention. The bleak range outside the window had him hypnotized. He felt a wave of weariness, but he did not move from the window to sit down.

"Your car," he told her after a moment, "needs worked on. The clutch chatters."

"I got to get it first," she said impatiently.

"So I sent two of the boys to get it," he went on,

as if she had not spoken. "You can use the station wagon."

"Whyn't you say so?" She got up from her chair, put her hands on the table for balance, then walked unsteadily from the room.

He had no answer. Out the window, the sunburned range was all his, clear to the broken blue and gray of the peaceful mountains. He would trade it all--every cow, rock, and blade of hot grass--for something, if there were anything he wanted in its place.

CHAPTER VII

Because his pitch was still faulty, Ohnmachtig had to tune his viola with a tuning fork. He had been playing the instrument more than two years, long enough for him to master certain technical problems sufficiently so that in playing he might listen to the music and not worry about the notes. After he set up his music to take best advantage of the window light, he glanced around the empty room, placed the fiddle under his chin, raised his bow, and began a sonata. Gradually the music made a special reality for him; he walked through the dim green hills of dead time, hills still in the orange light of old oil paintings, toward meadows rising and falling with the wind's touch on their grasses and flowers, between the mossy bank of a ruined wall and the joy of a falling brook. The landscape was the print of history in his nerves, a polyphony of what he knew against what he could only guess at, his own perfect game of beauty played with glass beads.

The dentist and his handsome family in their nearby cabin might have heard the music, but they did not look up from their magazines. On higher ground in back of the cabins, two deer standing in a poplar thicket must have heard the music. Now it was lost in the wind; now the

wind was still, and the music pushed through the trees.

Luther Gibbons heard it as he came along a path below the high ground, winding among fir trees. He was not prepared to hear music there, and when the wind's hissing in the trees grew louder, he thought he had imagined the music. But when he came into a clearing where the cabins were, he heard it unmistakably; and he had the peculiar feeling that he was following it. He could tell the music was not coming from the first cabin, but that was not the one he was looking for. He did not want to come on the source of the music; it was as though he had heard the sounds of a quarrel behind one of several doors, through one of which he must go. The second was not the right cabin either, so he had no choice but to be piped on. He did not pause in front of the architect's cabin, but walked up and knocked until the music stopped and a voice called from inside.

Standing on the threshold of the cabin, Gibbons saw the architect sitting in the silence of the vanished music with the fiddle in his hand, seeming more foreign and incomprehensible in that moment than the little dark Mexicans, singing God knows what in the summer twilight along the streets of Lemington. Nevertheless, he forged ahead with his business.

"I come to see you about the house," Gibbons said with a puffing sound, as he sat down on the couch.

"Of course," Ohnmachtig said, "I'm glad you could come." Again the architect seemed to see both strangeness and familiarity in the rancher's face, in the mild blue eyes beneath the heavy brows, the straight, broad nose above the rather long upper lip, the round, solid jaw.

"Well, like I said before, she told me you was an architect, so I asked you."

"On the spur of the moment?" Ohnmachtig asked.

The rancher drew his brows together as if he didn't think that was the way it had happened. "No, I had it on my mind for a long spell. I'd nosed around here and there to see what was what, but I didn't feel right with those fellows in Nalene."

"In Nalene?"

"The architects there. I forget their names. I couldn't talk to them about it. I don't know." Gibbons tried to express himself with his hands, but after a few ineffectual movements back and forth, they fell to his sides.

"You know nothing about me," the architect insisted.

"They said you was an architect, from Vermont or somewhere like that." The two men sat facing one another, Ohnmachtig in a straight chair with his viola in his lap, his music stand pushed aside so he could see the rancher on the couch. Gibbons' broad shoulders hid from view the whole

right horn of the quilted steer on the couch's back cushion.

"I have a friend in Vermont whose address I use when I'm in the United States, but I have no permanent address,"

"Ain't you an American?" Gibbons asked with a puzzled expression.

"Yes. I was born in Wisconsin. But you see, I've spent a great deal of my life travelling."

Gibbons suddenly looked attentive. "Where've you been?" he asked.

The other laughed. "Excuse me," he said, "but no one ever asked me that question in quite that way, not that it's a poor question. Well, I've had twenty-five years or more to travel, so one might say that I've been just about everywhere."

Gibbons also laughed. "I was just wondering. I've always had the money to go anywhere I felt like it, but I never went anywhere much. I reckon I didn't have the time. I just wondered where there was to go." He crossed his legs and held the instep of one big boot with his hand. "But I'd rather talk about the house."

"Yet you know nothing about me," Ohnmachtig said again. "I'm just a stranger here, an American who doesn't even live in America."

The rancher shrugged with resignation. "Maybe I don't know anything about you. Maybe that's the point. Maybe it's because you don't come from these parts. Some-

times a man will go a thousand miles to get a bull no different than one ten miles away, just to get new blood."

"I may not be the strain you want. You remember I told you I hadn't worked for some years now." He felt somehow flattered at the analogy.

"You said you wasn't retired. Are you able to work?" The rancher said the last quite gently.

"No, I'm not retired. I should work if I wanted to." He meant his tone of voice to reassure the other man. He moved his head to one side, and his pale hand tightened around the dark neck of the fiddle as if he were going to play. Outside, he had heard wind sweeping through the fir trees. That morning he had walked through the trees and heard the wind, sounding as it had everywhere in the world he had heard it. But here the forests were different, the trees appeared to be rooted in a desert not tamed to their nourishment, waiting to rule the land again with rocks and sand. There were some beautiful meadows, yet in certain places where he expected meadows were washed-out waste spaces covered with patches of dead weeds the color of clay. For a moment, he wanted to run away from it, to turn his back on an unknown wilderness in favor of any known one. The sound of the rancher's steady, almost monotonous voice reassured him.

"I still want you to draw me plans for a house," Gibbons bore on. "I'll pay whatever it costs." The big

man leaned forward and rested his elbows on his knees.

Ohnmachtig forced his frightening reverie out of his mind. "What is more, I don't have any notion of what you want. Just wanting a house is like just wanting a horse."

"Some fellows might want a horse like that, just a horse without any label on it. Their minds wouldn't be made up if they hankered after a Belgian stud or a Shetland mare. They'd want to see what was on the market, what the other fellow had. Maybe they had some extra hay they couldn't load onto no one."

"They would know whether they wanted a horse to pull a plow or a horse to ride." Ohnmachtig indicated the alternatives with gestures to the right and left.

Gibbons smiled. "I figure I want a house to live in, not a barn for the cows. I got a first class barn."

"Do you want a cottage or a castle?"

"Well, all my life I lived in a big place. I don't reckon I'd feel right in one of those small places now. Anyway, we got too much money for a small place. I got no idea what it would look like from the outside. Look," he said, giving up his patience at the limits of his ability to speak abstractly, "you draw up plans for a big place. You know what a big house ought to look like. You must've seen plenty of them in your time." He drew a breath deeply.

"You want what you might call a mansion, something on that scale?"

"A man might call it that. I wouldn't, because I already live in a mansion and I want to get shut of it. I'm pretty well off," he said earnestly. "I'll pay whatever it costs."

Ohnmachtig waved his hand to dismiss the cost.

"Maybe if you'd come to the ranch and see," Gibbons said rather timidly.

"Come?"

"Come to the ranch a few days."

"Then tell you what I think you want and whether I shall draw it." If he played the viola, the scene would dissolve, the clumsy man and his clumsier problem, his formless house, would disappear and the perfect world of music would rise up again. Scattered among trees, sitting on porches, riding horses on narrow trails, pitching horseshoes, wanting nothing or everything, his imperfect fellow guests would vanish too. The temptation was like a landfall to a foundering ship. But seated in the world of the cabin with its varnished walls, looking at him anxiously, Gibbons smiled. Ohnmachtig had not paid much attention to the rancher's smile; the expression did not seem particularly suited to Gibbons' face, it seemed almost an act of bravery. The architect nearly started at the smile,

as though it had been a menacing gesture, but instead he bent over and put his viola in its case.

"My wife would be pleased to have the company," Gibbons said, bending forward anxiously.

"The house would be on the site of the old one?"

"I don't know. Somewhere around there. There's lots of room." The rancher made a permissive gesture.

Now Ohnmachtig smiled. "A blank check, then?"

"I want you to sell me just a horse," the other said, but not as a joke. Gibbons leaned back and looked around the room for the first time, feeling a rare moment of satisfaction at the way things were getting settled. He could not forget how foreign the architect was, how false the man's careful speech seemed, but he was no longer bothered by his feeling. It was as though he had found a strange coin which he could not decipher or identify, but which promised to have considerable value.

As Ohnmachtig rose from his chair, his fear nagged at him, chided him for throwing himself into something which could have no reward, among people with whom he had nothing in common. In spite of it, he smiled again, and walked across the rough boards to the couch, where he shook the rancher's hard hand.

CHAPTER VIII

From the east, the house looked startlingly like Mont St. Michel seen across the tide flats of the Norman coast. The house was visible from the east for two or three miles; and as they came closer, the Gothic illusion faded and finally vanished. Except for the ground floor--which was bound on all sides by a roofed porch--the house looked as though it had been designed by a committee of architects working without a chairman, each member of which had a commission to infect the upper parts with something: one dormers, another windows and skylights, a third gables, a fourth chimneys, a fifth weather vanes, a sixth cupolas and lanterns. Perhaps later someone had tried to make the competition one piece, for everything above the porch was covered with scalloped shingles and a coat of representative brown paint.

They stood together at the foot of the monument, the rancher and his hat towering above the bare-headed architect. Gibbons face was non-committal as he told the other that this was the house he wanted to be rid of; his features were perfectly in place. Without looking at the architect, he said absently, "I couldn't get any use out

of all of that if I was to plant it all to grass and run sheep in the bedrooms and goats on the roof.

For an instant, Ohnmachtig stood looking at the house in silence, then burst into laughter. When the architect laughed, Gibbons realized what he had said and began to laugh too, shyly at first, then without restraint.

"I should keep it and run goats in it," Gibbons gasped, wrapping one arm around a newel post of the porch stairs.

The architect leaned against the other post, and as their laughter died, he said, "Pump it full of water and raise whales in it." They both burst out again.

"We got two dozen bedrooms," the rancher said, "and you could put a bowling alley in some of them." They were not used to so much laughing, and it soon took their wind. They leaned against their posts and breathed heavily.

Looking up at the house, the architect was reminded of a Victorian resort hotel, girdled with an orchard of wicker chairs for ancient youths and their nervous ladies to sit in on the porch, to enjoy the outdoors roofed over. Together they walked up the front stairs to a pair of identical doors panelled in thick frosted glass, above which was a transom of colored glass set with decorative quarrels that looked like the bottoms of bottles. The doors were of equal importance, and inside were separated by a formidable walnut coat tree from which branched coat

pegs tipped with brass rosebuds. Benches along the dark wainscoting of the entrance hall made the hall look like a waiting room. Above the wood to the gilded moulding and across it to the ceiling stretched an acre of calcimine. Three cold clusters of crystal grapes hung from the ceiling on brass chains interwoven with light cord. The far end of the entrance hall was identical with the one they had come through. The doors at the far end were open, and through them he saw a marble staircase shaped like a fat lyre. Gibbons led the way as they walked without a sound across the rug, but as they entered the room around the staircase their footsteps echoed loudly.

"This is the reception hall," Gibbons said. "That's what Uncle Harlan says it was called. I don't find anything to do with it." An oak bannister followed the shape of the staircase, and at the top formed the balcony railing for rooms on the second floor, the doors of which he could not make out in the gloom.

"I couldn't keep this place warm in winter if I was to burn the house down around it." They laughed again, and the sound of their laughter reverberated from the floors and walls until it seemed a hundred men were laughing. "I'd store potatoes in it except they'd freeze." Gibbons said, and their echoing laughter rang again.

Two skylights, set obliquely in the roof toward the

front, let some light in on the gray marble of the stairs, but left the balconies dark. "It's twenty-four feet to the ceiling," Gibbons said as he walked around the staircase and through a hall behind. Velvet-draped windows at the ends of two alcoves set on each side of the room admitted the only other daylight. Every six feet or so along the walls an orange light bulb sat in a baass candelabrum like a drop of curded fire. Gilt-framed mirrors hung over thin-legged oval tables between the candelabra. At the foot of the staircase was laid the only rug in the room, its Persian spinnings, angles and patterns a dispossessed and alien show at the edge of the marble stairs, under the heavy plaster and Western gilt of the ceiling, the fragmented crystal of the chandelier. Ohnmachtig stood on the rug and peered down through his glasses at its intricacies, until he looked up and realized that the rancher was not in the room. He stepped off the rug and looked around in confusion.

"I lost track of you," said Gibbons, reappearing.

"It's my fault. I stopped to look around," Ohnmachtig said. He saw two women materialize in the dim light behind Gibbons.

"Help yourself," Gibbons said, stepping aside. "I'd like to have you meet Mrs. Laird and Lorene. This is Mr.

Ohnmachtig, the architect."

They exchanged greetings. From their white aprons, Ohnmachtig guessed them to be servants. He could tell very little about them in the light, except that Mrs. Laird was short and elderly. Lorene had dark hair; he was afraid he might not recognize her when he saw her again. Mrs. Laird, who was nearer, fingered a knot of hair at the back of her head and tilted her head down to look at the architect through what he judged must have been the upper lenses of her bifocals.

"I'll have one of the boys bring in his bags," Mrs. Laird said, moving off across the reception hall at a brisk pace. Dark-haired Lorene drifted back into the darkness she had walked out of.

The architect heard other footsteps. It was Gibbons' wife Marjorie, who took charge of the guest at once. Luther left to move his car back to the carriage shed. Marjorie Gibbons led the way through the house to the south porch, where, in the sunlight, Ohnmachtig saw her clearly. She was carefully groomed in a summer frock. Her brown hair was short, her lips moved vigorously as she talked, and her teeth were very regular and startling white.

"You have caught us just the day before cleaning," she told him. "Every two weeks we have three ladies in from Lemington to help our two with the cleaning. I'm afraid your room may be a little dusty until tomorrow."

He protested, and she said, "I'm sure you don't mind." The blue of her dress made her eyes take on the same vivid saturation. He thought her an extraordinarily pretty woman, delicate, with fine bones and the grace of a dancer; although they had exchanged but a few sentences, he felt that it was the qualities of prettiness and grace which she cultivated to the exclusion of anything else.

"Luther told me this morning," she said as they walked around the house on the porch, "that he had finally made the decision to build a new house. We had talked about it off and on for years, but this morning was the first I knew he had decided." He wondered at the apparent lack of confidence between Gibbons and his wife.

"He asked me to visit him a few days--"

"We're so glad you could come--"

"To see if I would be interested in taking his commission to design a house. I told him that I haven't worked for some time now. I spend most of my time--" He stopped in confusion.

"I hope so," she said, smiling vacantly.

They walked silently for a few steps, and he said, "This is quite an unusual house. If you will forgive me, I was reminded of a hotel when I came up in front."

"It is far too big," she said seriously. "But we have kept it all up, because if we didn't, why we just

couldn't live in it at all. There are only five of us here in all this, three besides Luther and I: sister Edna and brother Amos, we all call Bud, and Luther's Uncle Harlan."

Far down the porch, the architect saw an old man in a large hat who might be Uncle Harlan. The old man seemed unbelievably far off, as though he were being seen through a miniscope, as distant as the rugged peaks of the mountain.

"You came here just before the cleaning ladies," Marjorie Gibbons said, breaking off as if she remembered she had already told her guest about that.

CHAPTER IX

On his way back from a walk the next morning, Ohnmachtig met Luther's uncle John Harlan by the carriage shed. The old man hailed him, and the architect walked across the yard bordered by the outbuildings to stand with him in one of the six massive doorways of the shed, which was a kind of barn itself in size, connected with the house by means of an eighty-foot canopied boardwalk causeway, one end of which sprung from the south porch of the house, the other from a porch in the near flank of the shed.

John Harlan Gibbons wore his broad-brimmed brown hat with the high crown that the architect had noticed the day before, a flannel shirt with a woolen vest unbuttoned, and a pair of black trousers held up by galluses. His smile of welcome drew in his brows and raised the puffy flesh above his cheeck-bones to such an extent that his eyes were slits. "Good morning to you, my friend," he called.

Ohnmachtig had noticed at breakfast that he was John Harlan's friend on the strength of their meeting at dinner the night before. "Good morning, Mr. Gibbons."

"Uncle John, to everybody around here. I noticed you was looking over the barn. It's not the prettiest barn around being made of rock and all, but it'll be standing there a long time after most of them is kindling wood. And there's a story how that barn come to be here." He put the stump of a cigar in his mouth and lit it with a wooden match.

"Indeed?" the architect asked.

"When Daddy, that's my father, first took a section homestead here he built him a wooden barn, little bit of a thing. Well, this lasted him through hard times, but he figured when things got a little better he'd build himself another and keep the little one. About that time the railroad was coming through, and one day a prairie fire come up and looked like it was going to burn out the house and everything. Well, Daddy figured the railroad had set it, so he saddled him a horse and run over to find a crew to help him fight it." The old man coughed out some cigar smoke. Ohnmachtig wiped his forehead with a handkerchief. It was beginning to get hot.

"Well, Daddy got his crew all right. They took wet sacks and shovels and some of them plowed a strip so's the fire couldn't get to the house. Well it come and got the barn before they got it stopped. Afterwards all them railroad hands started to go back, except one of them, a

big, tall Dutchman with feet broad as a horse trough. He just stood there in the yard and looked at the burned barn. The others'd got pretty far off when Daddy saw this big Dutchman still standing there, so he run out and tried to talk with him. All the big fellow would say was 'No English,' then he'd point to the burned up barn, bend down and act like he was shoveling coal." The old man took his cigar from his mouth, looked at the other, and chuckled.

"Daddy did this two or three times but this was all the big Dutchman would do. Finally, Daddy saddled him another horse, maybe it was the same one he hadn't unsaddled, and took out after the railroad foreman. 'What'd you leave one of your men behind for?' Daddy asked him. 'Didn't know I did,' he said, and come back with Daddy. There he was, still standing looking at the barn. He was maybe seven-feet tall, feet as big as sacks full of feed, like I said. 'There he is,' Daddy says, 'take the son of a bitch with you,' so the foreman went over and talked some Dutch to him. 'He won't go,' the foreman says, 'he says he wants to stay here and build a new barn.' 'Well,' Daddy says, 'whyn't the son of a bitch say so?' So he built the barn. Daddy had figured on a good-sized wooden barn, but the Dutchman didn't speak no English, so he went ahead and built a stone barn. He'd seen some good rock

just before the railroad come into Lemington, and he got a hold of that, hauled it here in wagons, and laid it himself."

Earlier, Ohnmachtig had walked around the barn to see it from each side. It was more than two-hundred feet long and almost a hundred wide, with a cedar-shingled mansard roof into which were set four hay-loading dormers, two on each side. The rough-quarried stones were light gray, and as he had watched the play of shadows and delicate morning light on them, he had thought that texture more nearly like the essential beauty of things than any fine cloth stitched up in close air by candlelight, any frame of pigments in oil. As the old man talked, Ohnmachtig stared at the barn's wall in shadow; the old man's voice seemed to come to him from a great distance. Then he saw Luther coming across the barnyard with a man he judged to be Luther's brother Amos.

John Harlan had started another anecdote, this one concerned with the trials of the winter of 1918 and 1919. Luther and Amos came into the shed, the shorter brother walking first. When the old man saw Amos, he broke off his winter's tale and stalked away through the door toward the house without acknowledging either of his nephews. Amos had not been at dinner or breakfast, so the architect had not been introduced.

"This here is my brother Amos," Luther said from behind, "but we all call him Bud."

Ohnmachtig shook the thick hand. "How d'you do?" Amos said rather loudly.

"I got to get over to the garage," Luther said as he went out the door of the shed. Amos had turned before Luther was out the door.

"Just a minute," Amos said to the architect; he walked to the door. "Catch that goddam mare," he shouted to someone Ohnmachtig could not see. "Well, run her back the other way!" he shouted again, moving out the door and across the yard.

The architect waited a moment to see if Amos was going to return. Then he went the way that the old man had gone, but turning towards the hill west of the house. He cut himself a staff from a willow bush, which was not of much use to him because it was too flexible. But with it in his hand, he trudged up the hill, a pale pilgrim in a tweed coat.

He was out of breath when he reached a meadow at the top of the lower hill and he sat on a rock, an island in the meadow's grass, to catch his breath. The meadow was a rough oval with a northeast-southwest axis, perhaps two hundred yards long and almost a hundred wide. It was early evening, and already the sun had gone behind the higher hills, leaving the meadow in shadow, but when the

architect reached the southwest end of the meadow, he could see the low ridge of bluffs and hills to the west behind which the sun would set.

Ohnmachtig put down his flimsy staff in the grass and took out a notebook and pencil. The southwest end of the meadow was some thirty feet higher than the middle, and after he sketched and wrote in the notebook for a few minutes, he strode down the incline, looking around like a scout, to the middle of the meadow. Then he paced back and forth from quarter to quarter of the oval, stopping now and again in the thick grass that came to the knees of his khaki pants to peer at the topography uncertainly through his thick glasses.

Ohnmachtig looked for his staff when he put his notebook away in the pocket of his coat, but after a minute of pushing away the grass with his hands, he gave up and went jogging again down the incline, following through the grass the trampled path of his earlier trip. At the brow of the hill in the middle of the meadow, he stopped, took off his glasses and with a handkerchief carefully wiped them before he studied the panorama.

Perhaps four-hundred yards below, the house with its green yard squared inside an iron fence was a geometric oasis on the border of the desert range. Patches of weeds and grass skirted the outbuildings and the barn, and behind the barn were several acres of irrigated pasture in which

horses of many colors were grazing. The roads among the buildings and the road north to the highway seemed to be almost the same dusty yellow color as the prairie, recognizable chiefly by their texture and pattern. Toward the mountains, which he thought must be at least twenty miles away, the land began to drop out of sight to rise again in ridges and hills, at last forming a series of foot hills.

Ohnmachtig stood with his arms folded at the edge of the meadow, motionless. His dark eyes behind their crystals moved from side to side, and occasionally his head changed its inclination. On the range, he thought he saw big herds of cattle grazing. The river to the southeast was barely visible as a silver thread twisted into the base of higher ground on the opposite bank, ten miles or so away at its nearest point. The blue-grey heights of the mountains dropped off into the buff-colored foothills east and slightly south. He shaded his face with one hand, though there was no sunlight in his eyes, and looked for a gap where the river must flow between the foothills and the bluffs on the farther bank, but he could find none.

The shrill cadenza of a meadowlark brought his attention back to the meadow behind him, and turning, he walked away from the edge into the cool grass. There was a suggestion of a smile on his whitish lips. He had built

in his imagination a house in the meadow that would see through its windows what he had just seen.

He was pleased with the world he had seen from the hill, pleased with the meadow in which the house would stand, but he knew nothing he had seen there, or felt there, had decided him. Whatever had happened took place before he had seen the ranch; he could not fix his change of mind precisely, but as he studied his decision walking down the hill, he thought of two things: the rancher in the bar saying, "If you don't work at it," and the smile he had seen on the rancher's face in the cabin, the smile that seemed an act of bravery which Ohnmachtig traced back in time to a winter night in Germany, to an unknown face in the light of a shopwindow.

He would wait, though, to speak of his decision, for in the house below the hill there might be obstacles which he could not overcome, obstacles which would make his entry into this new world impossible, which might make him change his mind about his downgoing, as it had been changed before in favor of the high cell of the eremite.

CHAPTER X

Before breakfast the next morning, the architect took a walk around the house and barn and through the pastures, considering his position. He had used what remained of the previous day after he returned from the hill west of the house to discover and weigh the obstacles to his accepting Gibbon's commission. From what he could learn by talking to Luther, without approaching the subject directly, Marjorie Gibbons was in favor of a new house, Edna would be indifferent, and Amos probably opposed. It apparently did not occur to Luther to take his uncle's feelings into account. However, Ohnmachtig had guessed what the old man's reaction would be, though John Harlan had said nothing that bore directly on the architect's presence; at mealtimes, nothing had been said about Luther's offer to the architect; the architect was merely a guest. Sensing that the ranch was more important as a symbol, as the legend of the old man's blood, to John Harlan than it was to Luther, Ohnmachtig had wondered at the old man's lack of curiosity at what an architect might do in the holy place, until he realized that no one had told the old man why he was here.

The day before, John Harlan had been friendly; now

it was as if a door he had once seen standing open had been shut and locked. The two of them faced one another in a broad hallway that connected the reception hall to the dining kitchen, the old man standing by the window where Ohnmachtig had passed him half an hour before on the way to his walk, the architect sitting on a brass-colored bench of carved oak.

"They knew how to build houses when this one was built," the old man said off-handedly.

The architect agreed by nodding his head, guessing that the other had decided why he was here and was looking for confirmation.

"Of course, you architect fellows know more about that than I do. My specialty was business and the law, but I paid some attention to building. Had to in those days, when there wasn't no architects." Though Luther had said nothing about his uncle and the house, he had mentioned that the old man had studied law by correspondence and had passed the bar. But Luther imagined the paper work had bored him, for John Harlan had spent his life as a clerk and partner in a dry goods store. He was a well dressed man who would talk to anyone, and who Luther said referred to anyone he had met as his friend.

It was silent in the house though the sun was well up. "You plan to make some changes on the place?" the old man went on, still holding to his casual tone.

He decided to come to the matter directly. "Your nephew wants me to design a new house."

The look on the old man's face tried to reflect more thoughtfulness than surprise, but behind the attempt at diplomacy the architect sensed the helpless outrage of a defendant who wakes suddenly to realize the trial is over. "Is that so?" He looked out the window for a moment, then turned back to the other.

"What's he aim to do with this place?" The question was asked in a low voice, as if John Harlan were afraid the sound of it would wake the sleepers.

"Tear it down, I should imagine," the architect said quietly.

The old man wanted to be incredulous. "This place? Tear down this place?" He put his hand on the windowsill in the sunlight to illustrate; the hand was gray and purple in the light, spotted with brown. "I guess not, I guess not!"

Ohnmachtig spread his hand out in a gesture of helplessness, saying, "I'm afraid that is what he has in mind." He would have liked to comfort the old man, but he had no idea how to begin or what to say.

John Harlan began to redden with anger. "He don't care a hoot for the ranch, never did. He don't say it, but I know. None of them give a tinker's dam about it. The

only difference between him and Bud is Bud would sell the place and get him a string of sporting houses if it was his to sell."

"I should think that he cares for the ranch if he wants to build a new house on it," Ohnmachtig said without conviction, knowing he could not touch the old man's outrage.

"It don't look like it to me if he aims to tear down the house his Grandaddy built, the one I was born in and his own Daddy grew up in, the place he grew up in too if he knows it. Tear down this place and build, build," the old man didn't know what. His fingers trembled as he unbuttoned the dark vest he wore over his bright flannel shirt.

"Is that what you come here for? To tear down the finest house in the county? Is that what he wants?" he went on.

"I'm not here to tear down this house. As a matter of fact, I haven't made up my mind whether or not I'll accept the commission." Except for the old man's voice, the house was so quiet that it seemed deserted. Its lone advocate stood inside and quarreled without hope against the inexorable judgement against it. So begins my downgoing, Ohnmachtig thought, my cup empties itself. How peaceful it is when one does not require even good opinions

of other men, he told himself.

"Do you know," the old man was saying more loudly now, "that President Garfield slept in the house that was on this spot before this one? Why, senators and governors and congressmen have all stayed upstairs here!" His eyes were wide, the past welled up in him as if he were a boy creating a war from the talk of veterans.

"The woodwork, this wood here, was brought to Fort Benton on a steamboat from St. Louis. The rugs," he moved to the other's side and caught his arm to point through an archway to the foot of the stairs, "come all the way from Constantinople in Turkey. All the beams come from oak trees in England, the closets got wood in them from Jerusalem itself, the colored glass in front was made special in France and come with a man to set it in."

Ohnmachtig wanted to say that he had not come to destroy the house; but the statement was not true; further, he had no chance to say anything. "My Daddy built this house," the old man said grandly and stepped away. The architect thought he was leaving in anger, but the other stopped in the reception hall and shouted back.

"This here room is bigger than any of them beaver-board shacks there in Lemington. You could set one right down here inside and never touch walls." His voice had grown shrill; it echoed in the hall; a chorus seemed to

be speaking. "The year I was born it cost him two hundred thousand dollars to put this place. There was kings didn't have any finer."

The old man's slippers made a hissing sound on the floor as he came back. The architect rose. "No one builds on this scale today," he said.

"You damn right they don't. You know what people live in nowadays? I'll tell you what. Coops, chicken coops. Little chicken coops for a bunch of little people. Everything's shrunk down." His anger was fading and began to resemble melancholy.

"Is there as much room now?" the architect asked without faith in the question or any answer it might get. Sunlight bore brightly in the window at the old man's back. The architect saw him backlighted, almost in silhouette.

"Room, you say? There's forty-five thousand acres of it between here and the Crazies. He's got room to build any damn thing, or leave anything up, no matter how big." John Harlan shook his head and made a clucking sound. "I just can't make him out."

"Him?"

"That boy Luther. Now his Daddy never talked much, but he wasn't anywhere near closed up like that boy. He don't say nothing to me, nor anybody else much. Half the time a fellow'd think the boy didn't have a mind to speak." The old man held up one hand in qualification. "Now he's

not a dumb nor ignorant man, I'll say that for him. And he works hard; but he don't seem to care much about anything." Anger had turned to complaint.

"His brother," the architect began.

"Hardly think they was brothers. I hate to say it about my own kin, but I ain't got much use for him. And Bud don't have no more regard for me than if I was a feed salesman. If I was maybe five years younger, I'd take a buggy whip to him he talks to me so common." The other sensed the old man's life as a muddle which would not turn clear.

"No," John Harlan went on, "it ain't right." He was not looking at the architect and seemed to be talking to himself. "The girl around all hours of the night, always smelling of liquor." He looked up at Ohnmachtig. "I always held that drinking or not was all right for a man to decide, but I never did hold with women doing it. It ain't right."

They stood without speaking or moving until they heard sounds overhead. The old man listened with the concentration of a hunter. Then he stepped away from the architect and took his old hat down from a peg on the wall. "That sounds like Bud's up. I'll just go on into the library and wait for breakfast." He put on the hat.

"If they don't watch out, everything'll go to pieces,"

he said, glaring at the architect. "I can tell," he said, "it won't be long. Something's going to happen to this family." He was Tiresias warning Thebes, stealing away to hide in the library until breakfast.

In the breakfast room, through an open door from the hallway where Ohnmachtig had been talking with the old man, Luther Gibbons was seated at a table. There was nothing in front of him. They greeted one another.

"I was talking with your uncle," Ohnmachtig said tentatively.

"I heard someone talking," Gibbons said, "but I didn't notice it was Uncle Harlan."

CHAPTER XI

The next day was an intricate one. The dawn was almost clear, but near the middle of the morning thunderheads stood in the west like giants threatening the Valhalla of the mountains in the east. However, the sun was covered only a short time as the dark clouds passed in the south, and soon the sky was covered with small white clouds that wandered like sheep. At noon the sky was the color of cobalt, but an hour later high winds that made no breath on the earth had blown a mottled sheet of iron overhead. Lightning cut through the clouds and touched the earth; thunder blundered after the lightning and shook the windows of the house.

Fifteen minutes after the rain began, Luther Gibbons could see from a window in the west wall of the house the blue sky under the broad tail of the storm, and by mid-afternoon the sun had dried away the rainwater. He liked storms in summer, for then the powers of nature, usually so subtle, made themselves known in shafts of lightning, the noise of thunder, the force of wind and the strength of rain. The enigma that made the grass grow imperceptibly, brought in the birds and took them away, changed the warmth of the air little by little to coldness and back again.

turned the colors of the earth on a slow wheel, then unwrapped itself in fire, thunder, wind and water. And even if the mysteries could not be better understood, they could be appreciated in a moment rather than an age.

But the sky was secret again, covered with mackerel clouds, as Gibbons walked up the west hill, and he paid no attention to it. He had not been indifferent to the calm parts of the day; he had seen all its moods from all over the ranch, and the calm parts had been the ground against which the rage of the storm was played. But his attention was fixed ahead of him, along the path so old that he would not remember a time when it had not been there.

Gibbons was climbing the hill, step after step in his slow, purposeful cadence, because he knew the architect was there. It seemed to the rancher that a great confusion was working itself out. He stopped, almost at the top, to turn and look back. Distance made toys of the house and its buildings, toys which, from his height, did not even need to be played with. He imagined he could control it from here, not with the pushing and words he had to use down there, but rather by picking the little things up and putting them in their places. If he wanted he could manage them from here, his brother and sister, wife and uncle, even the sprawl of the ranch itself. Yet standing on the hill then he wanted no part of what he saw below, not now.

He wanted to go ahead to the top. One night suddenly, he found the architect, the foreigner, and soon that man would set things right, the man whose special value was his origin in the outlands, the ambassador of order and regularity. In the new house, everything would go smoothly, because everything would be designed with that end in mind; there would be a plan. He was certain, as he gazed down, that his new house would be on the hill, from which high place his world--the dry acres of his land and the knots of his discouraging life--would resolve itself into lines and patterns as unmistakable as those on a map.

He turned and came to the hill's top.

Across the meadow, Gibbons saw the architect in his brown tweed coat. The architect waved his notebook. They met in the center of the meadow. The rancher took off his hat and stood facing the other, who put his notebook under his arm. Without speaking, each looked away, around the meadow.

Finally Ohnmachtig said, "Here is the place for your house, Luther." He lifted his pale hand. "The mountains to the east and south, the river and its bluffs to the north."

He walked south to the higher ground, leaving Gibbons standing motionless below. "A higher wing at an angle to the meadow down there," he called back, drawing

an arc in the air with the notebook. "The axis like this, turning at the base of the slope here."

A meadowlark piped in the grass, and the wind stirred the blades. "It'll be a magnificent house," Ohnmachtig called.

"Beg pardon?" Gibbons asked.

"I say, it will be a magnificent house." The meadow lark sang again.

As he came down the incline through the grass, the man in the tweed coat was not an impressive figure as Gibbons was used to thinking of impressiveness, yet the architect's authority seemed undeniable to the rancher, and he was disposed to question nothing the other might say about the form of the new house.

But Gibbons wanted to help if he could. "Come on back up this way," he called to the architect, moving as he spoke to the back of the meadow. "There's a place up here I'd kind of like to show you where we can get water if we can't sink a well right here."

They set off together into the higher hills, the rancher leading the way. Ohnmachtig had to walk at a brisk pace to keep up, and though he lost his wind almost at their destination, he did not ask to stop. The climb lasted some quarter of an hour until they reached the pond at the cliff's base. Part of the pond was in the shadow

of the short cliff. The two of them stood in sunlight at the pond's edge, the architect with his arms folded, the rancher with his hat off, wiping his forehead and neck with a bandanna. Both were breathing heavily. As he caught his breath, Ohnmachtig became aware of a putrid smell.

"What's that smell?" he asked Gibbons.

The rancher walked along the bank and stopped. "Here," he said, looking down. "Carcass of a rabbit here. Guess it's the one I shot when I was up here the other day."

The two men gazed down at the dead rabbit. "Looks like the magpies pecked his eyes out. I suppose they'll get around to the rest of him pretty quick," the rancher said without feeling.

The ruined eyepits stared up at Ohnmachtig. He felt a wave of terror break over him. For an instant, he wanted to run. Instead he turned from the bank, staggered to a rock, and sat on it.

Gibbons studied him, confused. He did not want to think that the architect was squeamish. At that moment, he would rather have apologized for shooting the rabbit; he would rather not have shot the rabbit.

But the architect spoke. "Just an attack of dizziness," he said in a husky voice. He looked sick still.

"It don't smell very good," Luther said.

"No, not that. I know what you must think, of course.

That doesn't bother me." The architect got up from the rock. "There's nothing really to explain, I guess. Just a vertigo, just dizziness."

"I just shot. I was watching for a coyote. Not much, I guess. There wouldn't be a coyote around here in the daytime." Gibbons could not help it; there was something in the way the architect behaved made him feel ashamed of his act, and because the act had been so ordinary, he could not imagine why he should feel ashamed.

"It's not the rabbit. I wouldn't have shot it, but that doesn't mean anything. Life comes and goes; in a minute, a million things die, a million are born. I don't have much to do with either the dying or the birth, but I don't kill," Ohnmachtig said.

"I don't know," Gibbons said, looking back at the rabbit along the bank of the pond. "Rabbits can get to be kind of a nuisance."

The architect saw the sky reflected in the still water. "I don't kill, but I'm not a polemicist. I don't argue about it, and I suppose killing is necessary. Let's forget about it."

Gibbons was willing to forget, but he said, "I guess I could have let it alone."

They did not stop on the way down until they reached the edge of the meadow where the new house would be built.

As they contemplated the panorama, Ohnmachtig broke the silence. "I am liable to these sort of fits, Luther. Perhaps I have lived alone too long."

"It don't make a bit of difference," Gibbons said earnestly. He was not sure he understood, but he wanted to forgive even if he could not be sure of what he was forgiving.

From their height movement below seemed a dumb show in miniature. Even the motion of a car travelling the road from the highway to the ranch seemed to have a theatrical grace.

"That's Bud in his convertible," Gibbons said.

They watched the car pulling its train of dust turn into the yard and stop. "That's Babe Sederstrom with him, one of Bud's friends he runs around with," the rancher said. Both of the men below wore large hats with brims folded at the sides, which tilted as the two drank from bottles. Laughing, they disappeared under the canopy between the carriage shed and the house.

Ohnmachtig sensed that his friend would go down now and announce the news. He wanted to say something to Gibbons, to prepare himself to speak or remain silent, but he did not know how to begin. "Bob," Gibbons said, "I reckon we can go down now so I can tell them. We'll talk things over later."

Marjorie Gibbons was in the breakfast kitchen alone when they came in, but they could hear Bud and his friend in another room. Luther's wife was seated at the table, drinking a glass of iced tea and reading a women's magazine. Gibbons told her that Ohnmachtig had agreed to draw plans for a new house. The architect felt her smile encouraging, but before she could say anything, Bud walked quickly into the room.

"What the hell's wrong with this house?" he said loudly. "We got that kind of money to throw around? It's news to me. Goddamn it, I ask old pussy-foot Simpson for some money to get a couple decent horses, and he just sits there and shakes his head like a jackass." The architect remembered that Luther had told him he had placed his brother's allowance in the hands of a lawyer in Nalene. A lean, high-cheek-boned young man who Ohnmachtig guessed must be Sederstrom stepped through the door and leaned against the jamb. He held a bottle of beer in his hand, as did Bud.

No one answered the brother's first outburst. "Whose idea is this anyhow," he said more loudly. "Why in hell didn't somebody ask me? "Jesus!" his voice rose to a shout, "what kind of an outfit is this?"

"You don't have to shout, Bud," Marjorie Gibbons said without looking at her brother-in-law. Luther stood with one hand on the back of her chair, regarding his brother

without emotion.

Bud leaned over the table. "I'll shout when I got to. Luther, I got a right to be in on things, damn you. This is part my place too."

"I found out," Luther began.

"Is that what this guy with the glasses has been hanging around here for? What's your name?" Bud said to Ohnmachtig, but turned back as though he wanted no answer. The architect wanted to leave the room. The family was turning itself inside out and he wanted not to see it that way. But he stayed, reminding himself that this sort of thing was what he must face if he intended to stick to his decision.

"I found out," Luther said slowly, "that Bob was an architect. They told me he was, about a week ago in The Corral bar, up the canyon from Nalene." It seemed as if he were going to narrate what had happened for his brother.

"I don't give a damn if he was a shimmy dancer," the other shouted. "That don't give you no right to go making plans and spending money behind my back. Pa might as well as give me the tops of the Crazies for all the good I get out of this place." He threw back his head and poured beer in his mouth. His shirt was half open to the waist, and it looked as if he were wearing a hair shirt underneath.

"You'll get your share when it's coming to you,"

Marjorie Gibbons said coldly.

"Oh yeah, after you pooped it away," Bud replied.

"Bob and me went up the west hill this afternoon and looked it over. He said he thought the hill would make a better place for the house, and he showed me how it was going to lay out. He said he'd draw up the plans." The words were almost the same ones he had used to tell his wife. He spoke in the same steady, almost monotonous tone of voice that the architsct remembered from their first meeting.

Bud made a face. "None of you got any sense. What you going to do for water up there? Fetch it up in your hat?" Sederstrom belched through clenched teeth, then smiled.

With an effort, Ohnmachtig looked at Bud and said rather louder than was necessary, "There's water above."

"You got that all figured out, have you?" Bud said looking at the architect, then back quickly to his brother.

"We'll take care of that, Bud," Luther said, still without heat. Ohnmachtig felt admiration for the big man's calmness.

"You take care, all right," Bud said sarcastically, putting his bottle of beer on the table across from Marjorie Gibbons. "Like you take care of the money. If I had any say around here, we'd own the other side of the mountain too.

How do you like that?"

"We would not!" Luther's wife cried, looking up. The brothers stared at each other.

After a moment of silence, Sederstrom said through his nose, "What do you aim to do with this place?"

"I'll live here," Bud said, turning his head halfway around to Sederstrom, who stood behind him. "They can sit up there on the hill and pick crap with the magpies." Marjorie Gibbons turned her head away.

"Tear it down," said Luther.

Bud picked up his bottle and threw it on the floor by the table. It broke with a popping sound; foam from the beer spread in an arm along the floor. "You tear this place down," Bud shouted, "I'll bust your head open, so help me God." He put fists on the table and glared up at his brother. The dark skin of his face was suffused with color.

Luther looked as if he hadn't heard. The architect felt the muscles in his stomach and across the shoulders tighten. He hadn't struck a blow in twenty-five years; he had no idea what he would do, but he felt as if he would do whatever he had to. The tension in the room broke as Mrs. Laird came in briskly with a pile of plates, followed by Lorene with a tray of silver. "I'll get that in a minute," she said in the direction of the broken bottle. "You all had just as well eat in here this evening."

Luther and Bud still faced one another. "You won't stand there and stare at me like a cow when I'm through with you," Bud said between his teeth. Marjorie's face was pale; she bit her lower lip.

"Good evening, Luther, Marjorie, Amos, Mr. Ohnmachtig," said John Harlan Gibbons as he came in the door from the connecting passageway. "It didn't look like any more rain at sunset, I'd say." Amos Gibbons glared at his brother, who looked at the floor.

"Hello, Uncle John," Mrs. Laird said finally.

CHAPTER XII

The architect made his preparations carefully, feeling his way through the unfamiliar task of designing a house. He exhausted the preferences and needs of the rancher and tried to forestall by using a bewildering jargon any inappropriate ideas Marjorie Gibbons might have had concerning interior decoration. She became sufficiently impressed. He did not want to force anything on her, or on Luther; but in esthetic matters he trusted no one but himself. He was certain they would be pleased with the house. Further, he knew that if he was to work there, he must have that kind of freedom from caprice he was used to or he would give it up.

He would be a guest in the old house while he worked. He got supplies and selected a big bedroom on the third floor of the house, a room facing the west hill where the new house would stand, for his studio. He resolved neither to rush nor prolong the drawing, so he worked when he felt he was accomplishing something and read or played the viola when he felt he was not. He took his meals with Luther and his wife; Edna was seldom in the house for meals, and Bud shunned the place after his quarrel with Luther.

One afternoon after the noon meal, the architect sat in a chair on the east porch of the old house. He had been working for two weeks and had come to an impasse which he thought an idle afternoon might solve. The range before him lay stunned under its curse of heat. He almost fell into a trance watching it, until he heard the sound of footsteps and looked to see John Harlan Gibbons coming to sit beside him. The old man was largely unreconciled to losing the old house, but the shock of finding out that there was to be a suite of rooms set aside for him in the new house almost converted him. He appeared to accept what he knew must happen.

They greeted one another and John Harlan began to talk about the Gibbons family, needing no excuse to begin. The architect supposed that the old man considered himself the last spokesman alive for the family.

"My brother and me was the only children in the family. Brother was John Montana Gibbons, he was the oldest, and I was John Harlan Gibbons, so they called me Harlan and him John. But now that's he's passed on, they call me John, Uncle John." The old man fumbled for a match in his vest.

"Brother added on a couple sections over south to what Daddy left him, and he kept things up and made money, but it was Daddy that did the real work, the pioneering.

He homesteaded, he bought mining property cheap and sold it dear, he invested a little here and a little there and got back a lot. Then he bought up land until he got the size place he wanted: almost forty-thousand acres then, and more than forty-five thousand now."

The old man stopped for breath, then waved his hand out toward the prairie. "Luther's done all right. He's got four bunkhouses and cookshacks out on the range, and houses for three foremen. Them fellows hardly ever get up to the main ranch here. He's got a couple of machine sheds too to take care of the sections he's got in hay. I forget how many ton we put up last year."

Ohnmachtig paid attention to what the old man was saying, but as he leaned back in his chair he felt as if he were hearing a phonograph record. "Now Daddy turned from farming to ranching as soon as the first drive come in," John Harlan was saying. "That must have been about '70. And by the time brother was born, he was one of the wealthiest men in the whole state, or territory, as it was then. He had plans for a big house, and it was finished the year I was born, in '80. You couldn't buy it today no matter what you was to pay. Now they going to tear it down like it was an old barn too far gone to fix."

He fell silent, wiping the corners of his mouth with a printed handkerchief. The architect, looking out on the

range, did not seem to be paying attention. The old man shook his head to think of what his nephew was doing to the grand old house. He had difficulty believing that one of his own blood would do such a thing. It was as if he had been set down among strangers, not his own kin. He confused the changes of the years, the differences in the way people talked and the way things looked, with his sense of exile. Each morning, he stood at an east window of the old house to watch the sun rise. Partly his was the vigil of a senior officer peering from the quarters of his retirement at a guard mounted by his successors; partly he waited to satisfy himself that another day was indeed beginning. This was his triumph. He had lived another night through to daylight. Survival itself was a victory sweeter than the success of those who were gone. Where was his powerful brother now? Was the elder brother who had been heir standing in the early light of another day? No, but he, John Harlan Gibbons, was there, for all his idling and talking, seeing the sun strike the sweet earth under which the bequeathers of power hid like animals. Most often when the new day wore on, he forgot his triumph and lapsed into resentment of the new world.

Among those of his blood, the friendly loquaciousness he loved had changed to extremes of bluster and silence. The country virtues he loved were not in them; they were strangers. What was to happen to the race of which he was

a member? Was it to be torn down like an old house?

"Well, that's not here nor there," he said aloud to his musings. "Was you in the war?" he said to attract the architect's attention.

"No," the other said, "my eyesight was too poor." Ohnmachtig had been thinking of technical problems in the house while the old man had been silent.

"Now Luther couldn't go off to war either. They said he had something ailing his kidneys. He went back to Rochester for it, must have been a half dozen times. I never did know just what it was, but they finally fixed him up. But by the time he was fixed up, everything was over. Bud went though. He was in Texas during the whole thing, and I guess he liked it there. He keeps talking about going back to ride in the rodeos, but he don't go."

A little breeze ruffled the grass from the house to the iron fence fifty yards away. "Brother was somewhat luckier than I was, I guess. But then, he got the ranch. I bought into a men's store in Nalene, more than fifty years ago. And I studied the law too, and passed the bar, but didn't much care for practice, so I stayed in the men's store. We sold the finest there was. They don't make stuff like it nowdays." He sighed for the old virtue.

They heard Bud's voice bawling out of sight. "You catch the pinto mare and I'll catch my roan and we'll ride

on up before supper," he shouted.

"That's Bud now," the old man said. "He went to a military school in the state of Missouri when he was a kid. He was a wild cuss when he was a kid, and brother took him to Missouri to one of them military academies before he had to send him to reform school. Brother died the next year--his wife was a Benton girl from Butte; she died a couple of years before that; I never married, myself--and Luther kept Bud on there for a year. He's five, six years older than Bud. But he brought him back, and I guess he finished up at Nalene." He sighed like a man oppressed.

Bud and Sederstrom walked into view, bound for the barn and corrals. Bud led the way, swaying from side to side on his short, bowed legs as if he were on shipboard. In trunk and arms, he was his brother's equal, but his legs were several inches shorter.

"That Babe Sederstrom would starve to death if it wasn't for Bud," the old man said. "At least he wouldn't have any liquor to drink or horses to ride." The pair entered the barn and came back out at once, carrying ropes. "There's a story that goes with that barn," John Harlan said, and told the architect about the big Dutchman again.

As the old man droned on, the architect took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. Before, he had tried to pay some attention, but now, he could not even follow the words. After a few minutes of leaning forward, looking down at the porch with his glasses in his hand, the architect realized that the old man was talking about Eddie.

"Now Eddie went to school some place in Wyoming, near as I recall," he said pulling out his watch. "It's time I went in and laid down for a spell." He got up and walked slowly across the porch. He let himself in as quietly as if it were the middle of the night.

"Hello," called Luther, coming around the house. "You been listening to Uncle Harlan?" The rancher came up the stairs two at a time and sat in the chair the old man had left.

"He was telling me about your family, and whatever other subjects suggested themselves," the architect said with a smile.

Gibbons' face took on a sad expression. He said slowly, "I was down at the barn a little while ago and I saw you and him talking up here on the porch." He looked down at his hands, palms upward, and seemed to forget what he was going to say.

"What happened, Luther?" the architect asked with a

puzzled look.

"I don't pay much attention to people. Maybe that's why things are in such a mess. Well, anyhow I looked up here and all of a sudden I felt sorry for Uncle Harlan, like you'd feel sorry for an old bum down on his luck, like I wanted to give him a quarter to get something to eat." He looked up at the other, drawing in his brows in bewilderment. "But he's my own uncle. He don't need a quarter, he's no old bum. But that's the way I felt." Gibbons heaved his shoulders and blew air through his lips.

From the barn, Ohnmachtig heard Bud and his friend shouting at each other, and laughing. At a distance, he thought, all laughter sounds happy; even weeping sounds like laughter. "I suppose I felt sorry for him too, when he sat here talking to me."

"Not there, I said, over here!" They heard a voice shout from far away, toward the barn.

"No!" Ohnmachtig said so emphatically that Gibbons looked at him in surprise. "I didn't feel sorry for him. I sat here and thought about something else." The pale man leaned toward the heavy figure of the rancher. "I wandered off in my own world and paid no attention to his."

"It ain't your place," Gibbons began with a shrug.

"Yes, of course it is. I mean it must be my place to feel pity, whether I show what I feel or hide it. That

is the only way to reach outside, where others are. How else can a man live?"

There was a pause. "He really don't have much left," Gibbons said, shifting around in his chair to face the architect, "not much at all. Uncle Harlan, that is. He used to go back and forth to Arizona to see some of his old friends down there, but I think most of them have died by now."

"Bud!" Sederstrom shouted. The sound seemed to hang in the hot afternoon without an answer.

Ohrmachtig leaned back in his chair and watched the cloudbank over the mountains.

"Well," Gibbons said quietly, almost as though to himself, "it looks like Uncle Harlan is a lonesome old man."

CHAPTER XIII

Coming in from the intense light of the street, Ohnmachtig could tell only that the body lay by the bar with one arm over the brass footrail. He would not have seen it had not Gibbons called it to his attention as they entered. One of the men stood by the door anxiously, but the rest went on with their drinking at the bar. The rancher and the architect had driven into Lemington to get a saddle, and against a direct trip back in the heat, the architect suggested they go to a bar and have a bottle of beer.

Out in the street they heard a siren. As the man at the door pushed it open, they saw an ambulance pull in to the curb and stop. The siren's scream sank in pitch, but it still sounded as two men in bright sports shirts pushed a white ambulance cart through the door. "Is he dead?" one of them called to the bartender.

"One of the boys looked him over," the bartender said rapidly. "He thinks he's gone. Right at the back, boys."

One of the two men was fat, his black hair smoothed flat against his skull; the other, younger, with curly hair, looked as if he might have been playing tennis.

Ohnmachtig sensed they were hot and perspiring as they pushed their cart past. The neat, chrome-trimmed stretcher was alien in the litter by the bar. One of the men grasped the feet of the body, the other the shoulders, and they hoisted it aboard easily; it was almost as though they had thrown a pile of old clothes on the cart.

"It's Dog Joe," the bartender chattered across the bar to them. "Too much muscatel. You seen him around here. The old Chippewa that hung around the dump."

"He sure stinks of wine," the fat man said.

"He was sitting back here slumped on the bar. I figured he was asleep. Then he sit up and hollered. Scared the hell out of me. Then he fell off the stool. Made an awful rattle laying there, but he quit a couple of minutes before you guys got here."

"He looks like a goner," the fat man said as they wheeled the cart out.

The architect got only a glimpse of the body as two men opened the door to let the stretcher out. The man's eyes were open, and he looked surprised. His skin was purplish brown, his matted hair the color of weathered pine boards. He wore a worn pair of bib overalls and a khaki shirt. A Western hat, rust colored and stained, sat on his chest.

"They was from the funeral parlor," Gibbons said. "They run the ambulance here." The sound of the siren

rose in pitch until it seemed palpable. To the architect it sounded like a protest, a mechanical extension of the cry the bartender said the Indian gave as he woke up at the end of the bar to die.

The siren was still loud when Gibbons turned to the bar and felt a surge of panic. For an instant, instead of his own face in the mirror he had seen the face of the dead Indian. He said nothing, but held tightly to the bar and closed his eyes.

Ohnmachtig spoke to the bartender for their orders. The coolness of the beer, first the bottle in his hand and then the beer itself in his throat, brought him back from his fright.

"But," he said to the architect, "I wouldn't want to die like that."

"Or live like that," Ohnmachtig said quietly. The living had no impact compared to the death, so far as the rancher was concerned.

"I wouldn't want to die alone, in a place like this," Gibbons said, cradling the bottle in his hands.

Things were getting back to normal in the bar. Someone had put a coin in the juke box. "Would you want to live alone in a place like this?" the architect asked.

"No," Gibbons said without hesitation. But he had seen the man die, or nearly seen it. He could not imagine the quality of the life, but the quality of the death had

been lying discolored on the floor a few moments before. "Neither one," he said.

"It is hard to know," the architect said after he took a drink from his bottle, "which is the worst, the living or dying in exile. It is probably harder for the Indian, if we knew it or if they knew it even, because the places they have been exiled from are still all around them."

They drank without speaking until they were finished. As they left, Gibbons said, "Indians ain't usually much account, but we got to be fair about it. We don't give them much help, except to dole out money so as they can sneak in and buy some barkeep's booze out the back door."

As soon as they got back to the ranch, the architect went upstairs to work. Gibbons took the saddle to the barn and walked back to the house. On the steps of the south porch, he suddenly whirled around and listened. He thought he had heard the wail of a siren. He held his breath listening, then shook his head angrily and went into the house. At the foot of the staircase in the entrance hall, he muttered almost in spite of himself, "not go like that, not alone." He wanted to go up and talk to the architect although he could think of nothing he would be able to say. But he knew the architect was busy, so he went into the library instead and took out a deck of cards. He could not keep his mind on playing, so he stared by turns at the

cards and at the files of books.

CHAPTER XIV

By the first of August, the architect decided his plans were far enough along for work on the house itself to begin so that the house would be completed before winter came. Luther Gibbons made arrangements to feed and house the first construction crew at the ranch, and after the foreman had talked with Ohnmachtig in the meadow where the new house would be, the crew moved up the hill, building a road and making excavations. From his windows on the third floor, Ohnmachtig could not see the new road, which was to wind up the south slope of the west hill, but he could see the power shovel digging into the hill, the workmen moving about, and occasionally the rancher himself, standing in the thick of things in his khaki shirt and pants, looking more like a member of the crew than the man for whom the work was being done.

The architect had a tall stepladder taken up, and from it he plotted views from the projected windows, staring out toward the mountains, his eyes shaded by a pith helmet, while workmen rushed back and forth below. He had not told Gibbons what he was doing, and as he made some notes on his perch, he felt the ladder shaking.

Looking down, he saw the big rancher climbing up the ladder to join him. The architect feared for a moment the ladder would collapse, but nothing happened. There wasn't enough room on the rungs for both of them, so Ohnmachtig swung around and stood on a bracing rung set in the supports of the ladder.

"You can't see it so well from below," he said, "but from these windows you'll be able to see the river winding along to the southeast."

"It sure makes a difference just this high up more," Gibbons said in a tone of voice that suggested the architect himself was due credit not only for the increase in height but for the view as well.

"I've tried to lay out each room with regards to the view below. That's why I had the ladder brought up," Ohnmachtig told the other.

"I'd have never thought of that," Gibbons said.

As they searched the panorama below, they saw Eddie's car come out of the carriage shed at a good rate of speed, turn abruptly, and race toward the highway road. The car made the corner on two wheels, narrowly missed the fence on one side, and sped off in a cloud of dust.

"What would you do, Bob," Gibbons said slowly, "if Eddie was your sister?" He had never sought such advice before, because he sensed following it might mean taking the kind of part in the lives of others he felt he could

not take.

"I never had brothers or sisters, Luther," the architect said, shifting a bit on his narrow perch. "And I don't know much about Eddie. But if you could get her something to do, some load to carry around, perhaps that might help. She needs a grip on the world."

The words made marvelous sense to Gibbons, and as he climbed down from the ladder, he resolved to think up something for Eddie to do, and to submit it to his friend for approval. But he did not think of it again until the house was almost finished, and then it occurred to him that he had no idea what Eddie could do.

As confidence between the two men grew, nothing happened to change Gibbons' notion that his life would right itself in the agency of the new house. The architect sensed that the rancher's delight--which he had insufficient words to express--was out of proportion to the event, but he enjoyed the dozen handshakes a day which Gibbons gave him in lieu of words of pleasure, without reflecting to any extent on its cause. The two had not a great deal to share; their minds and lives had been too different. Gibbons listened and marvelled at what the architect knew, but there was no question of his understanding much of it. However, the hours they spent together riding around the ranch after the heat of the day were happy ones. Gibbons found a new pride in his ranch and took his friend to parts

of it he himself had not seen for many years.

Before the middle of August, the foundations were poured. At twilight that day, the architect met Gibbons on a porch of the old house. "I want you to see something," he said smiling, leading the way through the house to his studio.

On a studio table, set on a papier-maché hill, was a model of the new house. The lower level was stone, the upper filled timbering. Its shape was that of an irregular hexagon composed of a rectangle and a parallelogram joined. The rectangle lay on the lower part of the meadow, and where the incline began the parallelogram reflected the change in axis to conform to the hill. There was a huge chimney in the lower part of the house, and a row of smaller ones identifying the sitting rooms ranged with the bedrooms along the second story, from which was suspended a cantilever balcony connecting with dormers set in the roof.

The architect watched Gibbons rather anxiously. He was satisfied with the house, though he was afraid the rancher might not be. Gibbons had seen only sketches and floor plans; the architect had felt a model would be better than an elevation and had avoided drawing one. Often the architect had been struck with the feeling that the rancher would not want the house he was drawing, for what he was working at was the first public example he had made of those welter of ideas he had accumulated about houses.

Almost always when his doubts came, he would hear, or imagine he heard, the wind in the trees on the west hill, and his fear would mock him. He would push himself away from the board to call himself fool. There are places, he would tell himself, that you must see again, there is a little of your life yet to see; you have come this way without going down, why must you do it now? Yet he had taken off his glasses, rubbed his eyes, pulled the light closer to the board, and stayed.

The rancher shifted to see the model from another angle. He had not been able to tell much from the rough sketches and he did not know what to expect in any case. His wife had shown him pictures in magazines, but these were so different one from another that they only confused him; besides, they were all far too small. The model dissolved his uncertainty. He walked all around the model twice before he turned to shake the architect's hand vigorously.

"My young helper from the contractor's crew did most of the work," the architect said relieved.

"It sure looks wonderful to me," the rancher said with awe, "worth every penny." He turned away to squat down and study the model again. After a moment he looked up.

"Bob," he said tentatively, "are you going to need

this? That is, after everything's done?"

"I don't imagine so," the other said.

"I sure would like to have this model," he said. At that moment, he was ready to pay the cost of the house for the model. Everything was perfect and tiny--walls, roofs, windows, walks, rocks, and even the grass. He was looking at fairyland.

"Of course you may have it."

"I'd like my wife to come see it," Gibbons said.

"We'll go to get her." He took a piece of paper from another table. "I think we may be able to use quite a few things from this place. Nothing structural, but some of the fine wood in the house can be used."

The rancher took a few moments to say, "I hadn't planned on keeping any of this place."

"No, of course not. But you can't get the hardwood we need very easily, and some of the wood in these sizes here isn't cut any longer. The maple floor in the east den is in five inch planks. There is teakwood panelling and mahogany that I doubt we could find, and beams of English oak. Also the linings of the closets, cedar," Ohnmachtig said. Gibbons said nothing.

"It will not look the same in the new house," the architect said.

"How much do you reckon it would cost to sell all of

that for scrap and get new wood?" Gibbon said at last.

"It's going to be expensive even taking the old wood out, cutting it,--" the other replied.

"You aim to cut it up?" Gibbons looked at the architect.

"Yes, cut it to fit the new spaces, sand it, and refinish it," Ohnmachtig said.

"Well, that's different. If you aim to cut it up. There's no sense getting new and letting this go to waste."

"Oh," the architect remembered, fumbling with the model. "The roof comes off. You can see some of the rooms and some furniture."

The rancher leaned over carefully and peered down into the rooms. He examined them one by one, and then said, "I want my wife to come up and look."

He walked out of the room, down the hall, and stopped at the stairwell. "Marge!" he shouted down the flights of stairs, "come on up here and see what Bob has made for us. Come on up!"

CHAPTER XV

"The pleasures of my life have been mostly what I have seen," the architect said, "and because I have had money and time, I have seen most of the things I wanted to see when I was a student, and many things besides."

Sunset, and they sat in the new house among the ends and tatters of its birth and heard the meadowlark come up to sing now that the machines were silent. "There are things I think I should like to see again."

"Well, you're just about done here," the rancher said. "You can go on from here, if you want to move on. Of course you're always welcome to stay here. You know as well as anybody that we got plenty of room." He talked more during the months of building than he could ever remember talking. He told the architect everything he could think of about the ranch, his boyhood on it, about meeting his wife, about the idiosyncrasies of his cars, and the merits of the ranch hands and the foremen. He had not known that he knew so much, and the discovery delighted him. "I'm getting about as gabby as Uncle Harlan," he told the architect.

But for the most part, Gibbons listened. Now that the house was well along, the architect had free time, and he and Gibbons--sometimes with John Harlan--sat and talked

on the east porch of the old house. When the old man was there, he would start out talking, but after a few minutes he listened with his nephew to the architect. Both Luther and the old man were fond of history, the old man because he imagined himself to be part of it, Luther because he remembered an odd assortment of facts from school. So the architect recreated for them and for himself great cities and buildings of the ancient and medieval world: the wonders of Egypt and Cathay, the temples of India, Babylon and its garden, Rhodes and its Colossus, the legendary tower of Nimrod in Babel, Thebes and its seven gates, Troy and its wall, Athens in its Golden Age, Carthage and Imperial Rome, Constantinople and Bagdad, Seville, Karkorum, the city of tents, Xanadu of Kubla Khan, Florence, Venice, Perruggia, and Christian Rome, Paris, Brussels, London, Vienna, Budapest, and Prague.

They heard him talk about hundreds of buildings as though they were beautiful women. Luther got a map from the library on which he located the places the architect talked about, took a tour of what seemed to him to be every church in Europe. Sometimes the architect would draw sketches of a building he thought they would find particularly interesting, his face close to the paper and his pencil darting and jumping. Sometimes afterwards they would go inside almost drunk, their heads swimming with a hundred splendors of the eye the little man with the thick glasses

had made for them out of what they thought was a fantastic memory. He was in love with the world he had seen, and some of it he had not, and they felt for this world of his, which they knew only through his agency, if not love, at least that vicarious adoration a person might feel for the sweetheart of a friend.

Neither of them remembered much of what he told them; but they remembered how he remembered, and it held them to hear the man rush up and down continents, in and out of buildings, telling about them as though he had built them.

One night after a session on the porch, Gibbons decided that Ohnmachtig was by a great deal the most exceptional man he had ever met.

"Marge," he said to his wife, "I don't think I ever run onto a fellow like Bob." They were preparing for bed. Marjorie Gibbons sat in front of a vanity, plucking her eyebrows. Luther was sitting on the edge of their bed, looking at his hands.

"Ouch!" she said sharply. "What's that?"

"Bob," Gibbons said earnestly. "I just never can figure out how I was lucky enough to get him to draw up plans for me."

His wife murmured something he did not hear. Gibbons' head still spun with the intricacies of his friend's knowledge. "The things he knows! Why," he turned to face his wife, "he knows lots more about buildings that some of

the guys who put them up."

"I suppose he does, dear," she said, straining forward toward the mirror.

"Marge, he's a great man. I just count myself lucky to have him for a friend." Gibbons rolled back on the bed and stared at the ceiling. "Yes sir, he's a great man."

The rancher remembered telling his wife how he felt about the architect as he and the architect sat in the skeleton of the new house, and he was aware of his judgement more than ever now that the house had begun to take shape. He and the architect sat on saw horses, each idly working a piece of scrap wood with their fingers.

"I learned to play my viola only a couple of years ago," the architect said, "and I think I did pretty well for a man of my age."

"I never learned to play anything," Gibbons said. "My wife plays the piano."

"The hard part is over for me now, and I don't think I should care to try it again," the other said.

"A fellow doesn't hear much of that kind of music around here. I never did get a taste for it." He thought about it. "I really never cared much for music at all. My sister likes that hillbilly music. She even took up with a fiddler in a band one time. But I just didn't ever

really pay much attention to it. Now I can recall they told us in school about some composers. I remember about Wagner I guess because they had a play the same as one of his operas. There was a sword fight at the end, and everybody hollered at that."

It was dark outside. "I remember reading somewhere about that fellow, what do you call him? Beethoven? who got deaf and couldn't hear his music. My dad got hard of hearing toward the end."

Ohnmachtig made a sound that resembled choking. Gibbons looked at his friend in alarm, and he thought the architect was going to cry. "What's the matter, Bob?" he said. "What's the matter?"

The architect put his head in his hands, but in a moment he looked up and said, "Just a dizzy spell, vertigo."

"You sure you're all right. We can go down and call for a doctor, or I can take you in."

"No, no, Luther." The wind blew; remember Beethoven, his fear told him, the nature of his loss. "It's dark. We'd better get down the hill."

"There's a good moon. If you're sure you're all right," Gibbons said anxiously.

Ohnmachtig said he was, and they turned out the work lights. The moon shone through the frame of the roof, and Gibbons heard his friend shuffling after him. "Watch your-

self here," he called as they cleared the house. He walked down a plank incline, ducked under a scaffolding. A step or two, and Gibbons heard a sound; turning, he saw the architect fall.

Ohnmachtig had hit his head against the scaffolding. His forehead was cut, and he held his hand to it as the other helped him to his feet.

"I didn't see the board," he gasped.

"You all right? Are you hurt bad?" In the moonlight the architect's face looked old and frightened.

"I didn't see it; I don't see too well at night." They went down the hill together then, the architect stumbling, the rancher holding him up. Mrs. Laird was still up. She washed and bandaged the cut, and Ohnmachtig joked about his fall. Gibbons went to bathe, and Ohnmachtig said he would go into the library. When Gibbons came into the library forty five minutes later, the architect had gone. There was a book on the table, which it looked as though the architect might have been reading. The rancher picked it up, and thumbed through it. It was poetry, and though he did not read poetry, he thought he might take it to his room and look at it sometime. The title page said it was the poetry of John Milton.

It was the end of September.

CHAPTER XVI

The greetings were in pantomime. Mouths moved, faces broke open in dumb laughter, hands darted out of pockets, grasped other hands, and fled from the union back to pockets; shoulders moved in cadence of laughter. The pantomime was not perfect though; Ohnmachtig heard a sound now and then, a laugh or a shout coming in to betray the illusion. Laughing, smiling faces at the window, he thought as he sat behind the glass of the livingroom and I am inside now. But I am not what they are looking for. He took off his glasses and covered his eyes.

He seemed to see an old man dressed in robes, a Choragos in a Greek tragedy, against a background of rocks and wilderness like the blasted landscapes in certain of Leonardo da Vinci's paintings. The old man's voice was cold and angry. "You have left your world for nothing, this is your weakness. Go out of this Switzerland before the snow, follow the Rhine to Strasbourg to see the church turned red at sunset. The color will soon fade, and you with it! Go through France to Perpignan and look south before the Pyrenees disappear in the night, cross to England to look up through the gentle air at Durham from the river, walk through the bones of the Acropolis. If you

wait, do you expect to see Kyoto again in April? Has all this meant nothing to you? Has it meant nothing at all?" He listened to his indictment of himself, not really moved by it, but rather wondering at the dramatic form it had taken. As the voice had scolded, he had seen the sights it talked of; now he opened his eyes to see the work of his own hand, the heavy beams against the white ceiling, the massive stones of the fireplace to his left, the polished geometry of the paneling around him, the space he had closed off and shaped radiating from where he sat in patterns he knew though walls shut them away. At the center of it he sat neither triumphant nor defeated, not jealous of the beauties he had imagined nor satisfied he had in his house been consonant with them, or able to be. Beauty was beside the point. In the storm he had boarded a strange boat carrying passengers with whom he had neither origin nor destination in common, but with whom he felt he must travel or sink. And he had worked among them. Sounds of the party came insistently through an opened door.

Gibbons beckoned him from the terrace, and he went out. Marjorie Gibbons raced back and forth through the crowd in ecstasy while her husband stood by the door in an aura of proprietorship, shaking hands with everyone who came in reach. He took Ohnmachtig's hand, said, "I wanted to have you meet some folks," and looked through the crowd.

"They don't seem to be here right now, but it don't matter. Come on over and sit out here." They sat in a pair of folding chairs. The rancher's gratitude to Ohnmachtig was something of a burden to him, since he had never been particularly grateful before, and since the debt was one he sensed money could not discharge. Beyond that he lacked experience. He tried a clumsy solicitude, which he executed by following the architect around like a dog, until he realized that his generosity was a burden to both of them. As evidence of his esteem, he introduced the architect as "My friend, Bob Ohnmachtig," and which, beyond esteem, seemed to sum up acknowledgement of his obligation as well. But on the terrace, there was no one for introduction, so Gibbons sat silently with his legs crossed, lost in a timeless debauchery of pride in his house and his friend.

John Harlan passed by with another man of his age. Gibbons smiled and leaned toward the architect. "Uncle Harlan has made up a story for every stick of wood we took here from the old place. He's just as proud of it as I am."

"He would have been perfectly happy only if we had hung the entrance hall chandelier from one of the beams." Ohnmachtig said. He was beginning to feel comfortable in the hustle and noise on the terrace.

"Eddie was here a while ago," Gibbons said, craning

to look for her. "I reckon she'll be leaving as usual soon. I didn't look for Bud to come. After we closed down the old place, he moved his stuff over to the bunk-house. One of the boys says him and Sederstrom rented a motel in Nalene."

Gibbons shrugged his shoulders. "Well, there's plenty of room here for him when he wants to come back." They fell silent in their chairs while the party rose and fell around them.

The guests stayed on the terrace after sunset. Some danced in the dim light of naked bulbs strung across in lieu of lights on the perimeter not yet installed. Gibbons said he thought every rancher for a hundred miles around must have come to the party, along with most of the doctors, lawyers, bankers and businessmen from Nalene and Lemington.

At midnight, a Dr. Dekker from Nalene sought the architect out. Dekker had studied in Europe before the war, and the two of them strolled around the terrace talking of places they both knew. The dancers under the string of lights in the center of the terrace forced them to walk into a badly lit corner, where Ohnmachtig stumbled into a chair. He stopped, turned to go another way, and ran into another chair. The doctor moved to help him, but before he could reach the architect, Ohnmachtig had tried to move

again, this time running into a table and almost overturning it. He stood helpless as the doctor took his arm.

"Is there anything--?" Dekker asked.

Ohnmachtig was breathing heavily. "Perhaps you might help me to go where the light is better."

The doctor turned him around, for Ohnmachtig had been facing the darkness of the plains below the hill. They stood without speaking for a moment, but before they moved into the light the architect said, "One does not really miss the dim circle of light at the end of a tunnel until it goes out altogether. If I am careful, I can usually find my way back to the light, but if I become panicky--" he said with an apologetic movement of his hands. "Please forgive me."

Dekker went with Ohnmachtig to the house, where the architect excused himself. A few minutes later, Dekkar found the rancher watching the dancers through a window of the livingroom.

Gibbons could make no sense of what the doctor said. "What's that? What's that? he asked as though he hadn't heard.

"He has Retinitis pigmentosa, that is, tunnel vision. He should have help if he's out after dark."

"There's something wrong with his eyes? What's this?"

"He has lost his sight around the periphery, that is, around the edges," the doctor said, waving one hand in a circle.

"I don't know," the rancher said, shaking his head. He felt Dr. Dekker as an evil man, and for an instant wanted to hit him with his fists.

"It's like looking through a tunnel in the daytime, and at night, he's almost blind if not completely so. He hasn't said anything about it?"

The rancher shook his head.

"Now Luther, this isn't strictly ethical, but I thought he probably hadn't said anything to you about it and he needs help if he's out after dark." The doctor moved closer and lowered his voice.

"Is there a chance, I mean could it be worse, could he--" the words would not come to Gibbons' tongue.

"Go blind?" the doctor asked.

In his confusion Gibbons wondered why he had not been able to say the word. He nodded.

"I just can't say, Luther. Sometimes it happens that way, sometimes not. I just can't say." Dekker moved still closer. "I wish you wouldn't mention--the ethical business."

"No," the rancher said huskily, "not a word."

"I thought you ought to know," the doctor said confidentially.

Gibbons mumbled his thanks and walked away in a state of confusion that was almost like a trance. He crossed the livingroom without seeing it, went into the entrance hall, and started to go out into the darkness in back of the house. There were only two things he could think of: the hope that his friend's trouble was not serious, and the premonition that the worst, whatever it might be, would happen. He felt as though he must go to help Ohnmachtig, but as he turned to walk back through the hall it was as if his feet were caught in a mire that made his steps progressively harder and threatened to stop him altogether.

The rancher stood uncertainly at the edge of the livingroom until his illusion of helplessness failed. He saw the architect nowhere, so he walked out to the terrace, then through other rooms looking. He had no idea what he would say if he found the architect, but he continued to look until Mrs. Laird told him Ohnmachtig had gone to bed. He recovered enough composure to join his wife in saying goodnight to their guests.

The rancher blurted out what the doctor had said to his wife when they had retired to their sitting room. At first, she would not believe him, but after he had gone over the conversation a second time, she had it straight in her mind. She tried to reassure him, but he would do nothing but sit in silence and shake his head as if in disbelief.

He lay beside her staring into the dark for an hour before he went to sleep, and when sleep came, it was black and dreamless.

In the morning, Gibbons left his wife still asleep. He asked Mrs. Laird if she had seen the architect. She thought he had left on his morning walk, but she didn't know where he had gone. Gibbons started out of the house to find him; but he could not make up his mind where to look, and after a few minutes of standing in back of the new house indecisively, he decided to attend to his business on the ranch, which would give him a chance to think things through.

The day was bright with the southern sunlight of autumn, yet the world seemed dimly lit to him. Nothing made sense of itself, and he did not want to try to make sense of things that resisted so strongly. He said yes and no to his foremen, but he could not remember after he left them what they had been talking about. Ten times an hour he went over the conversation with the doctor, as though hidden somewhere in it was a clue to the falseness of what he had been told.

While Luther was on the range, Marjorie Gibbons was finishing her breakfast. Every sound made her start up to see if the architect were coming in. She expected him somehow to look different now that she knew his secret.

When he didn't come and she had finished, she walked down the hill to the old house to look for him. At the same time she wanted to meet him, she dreaded it, because she did not know whether she could bring herself to tell him what she knew; but for her husband's sake she was determined at least to confront his friend.

The architect wasn't in his studio. She stood uncertainly in the doorway looking at the boxes of things that were to be taken out of the old house that day. On the table the architect used for a desk lay a book she thought must be a ledger. She glanced at it as she came in, stopped, and looking around to see if there were anyone to see her, turned the pages and read. As she read the last entry in the book, a feeling of numbness came over her. She read the lines again and then a third time. At last she left the room and walked out of the house on the planks laid on the subflooring. Outside, she stood dazzled and bewildered in the sunlight. When her eyes became accustomed to the light, she saw the architect down by the barn. He can't see me, she thought; yet he did, and waved. She waved back slowly and turned to walk up the west hill to the new house, biting her lip.

Luther was not in the new house when she came in, so she went to their rooms to wait, leaving word with Mrs. Laird that she wanted to see him. He came in shortly after-

wards; she could hardly bear to add to the burden she sensed he was already carrying, but after a false start, she told him what she had read in the architect's book. Gibbons face was set and pale. She had to try again.

"It says that, right in his book. It was open there on his desk. Maybe he'd been writing in it. It had some sketches of the house in it, so I looked. Luther, I didn't know it was his diary. Right there it was." She watched him anxiously.

"Tell me again." His wife wasn't real. If he closed his eyes and opened them again, she would be gone.

"Luther, I thought it was just a book of pictures he drew of the house. How was I to know?" Tears welled in her eyes.

"That don't make any difference. What he said again."

"I don't remember the exact words. That his doctor was right, that he noticed his eyes getting worse. That in nine months or so he would be blind, that he could still smell, and touch, and hear the viola he learned to play so he would have something after--"

Gibbons leaned against a table weekly. He felt he did not dare look down. His legs would not move in the terrible mire; they were locked and without power, as though his strength had drained away in a dream.

"The poor man," she said faintly. "It will be so hard for him, because he has seen so many things and has enjoyed them so. But maybe because he has seen so much--"

"What's that?" Gibbons said. His voice almost broke.

"I said that because he had seen so many things--"

He heard nothing more she said. The architect's voice sang in his mind. He heard his friend talking on the porch of the old house, seemed to hear at one time everything the architect had said about the far-off world he knew was there only because the architect had told him it was; the voices piled one on the other until Gibbons was afraid his head would burst. He seemed to see his friend's eyes moving like caged animals behind their thick crystal walls; then the eyes vanished, only the dark hollows of the pits remained; he remembered the rabbit he had shot lying by the pool above where he and his friend had seen it that afternoon, its eyes gone to feed the carrion bird. His wife's voice came drifting to him. He shook his head dumbly.

"Nothing," he said to her question, and walked out of the sitting room into the bedroom. He heard her go out. He went through a pile of magazines until he found the book he had taken to his room in the old house, which had been carried to the new with all his things. He sat down

and went through it page by page, until he came across the words, "When I consider how my light is spent--" He stared dumbly at the title and the first line, but read no farther. He closed the book carefully, and put it in the drawer of the little table beside the bed as gently as if it were a living thing.

The rhythm of walking took the edge from his confusion. He had left the house and climbed the higher hills in back of it. Even though he had lost his hope for his friend, he wanted to be alone to prepare his face for their meeting. After a while he stopped and realized that he was standing by the pool where he had shot the rabbit, where he and the architect had gone the afternoon the architect agreed to design the new house. He looked carefully along the pool's edge, but even the rabbit's bones were gone. So he sat on the grass by the pool and watched its water. In a few moments, he lay back on the grass and slept.

He woke with difficulty. Once he had come half awake because he imagined he heard voices shouting, but sleep was powerful and he sank into it again. Something dark covered the sun from time to time, and when he finally sat up, he thought there were clouds in the sky. His predicament and the realization that the clouds were of smoke came to him at the same moment, and he got to his feet. The source of the smoke was downhill, and he ran toward it. He saw in glimpses through the trees as he ran that the

smoke came from the area of the old house, not the new. Several hundred yards above the new house, he stopped in a grove of fir trees in which he had played when he was a boy. He knew it was the old house itself that had burned, for he had never before been able to see the road on the other side of the old house from the grove because of the tall roofs.

"Where is everybody," Gibbons shouted to his uncle as he ran onto the terrace of the new house. He did not wait for an answer, but ran on down the hill.

"Nobody was inside the house," he heard his uncle calling after him. "Everybody's all right. It started in the basement. There wasn't nothing we could do." He heard no more.

The walls and roof were gone, and nothing much stood above the black, burning ruin but pipes melted awry. Marjorie Gibbons was halfway down the hill. Below, the ranch hands stood dumbly around the fire. They had knocked the canopy down halfway to the carriage shed with a tractor. One of the men was spraying water on burlap sacks laid out on the side of the roof of the carriage shed nearest the house.

"Did everybody get out?" he called to his wife as he ran down the path. "Did anybody get hurt fighting it?"

"No," she said, "everybody's all right."

"Mrs. Laird, where's she? and Bob?"

"I had Lorene take her to her room to lay down." Her eyes were red, but she was not crying. "Bob is in Malone. He left before the fire, took his stuff out and brought it up. Somebody said it started in the basement, where the painters for the new place kept their paint and varnish. By the time I heard everybody shouting, the whole thing was in flames." She put one thin hand to her forehead and inhaled deeply.

The house was gone. He felt no sentimental attachment for it, but the fact that it was gone made him feel sick at his stomach. When he had climbed the hill, it had been there; some of the insides were gone, but he had looked back at it, and it existed, it was there, visible, of a certain shape. Now it did not exist, and there had been nothing for him as a warning that it would disappear. There was no farewell, no premonition. Here. Not here. The fact of its being gone so finally made him sick, even though he had planned to lose it long ago.

"Bob should back in a half-hour or so. I'll get something to eat--I don't want to bother Mrs. Laird." She turned to go up the hill. "Where were you?"

"I took a walk back on up. Sat down and fell asleep."

"Oh. Come up when you're ready." Gibbons watched his wife go back up the hill. He felt as he watched that she was a person whose name he knew, but to whom he had never been introduced. The words of her invitation to him

to come when he was ready seemed to have come from a stranger who wanted to help him. He was grateful for the help, but he wanted it to come from someone close to him. He felt love for his wife as he watched her slim body on the hill, but he could not bring the love close to him. Down the hill, his men were milling around aimlessly. At the top, his uncle stood watching like a statue; only the smell of smoke seemed to make a real impression on his senses.

Gibbons went up to the house then, but he walked through it to his car without stopping. The fire and his friend's sorrow seemed knotted together like a jumble of rope. He fought knots of words, but nothing came out right. For an instant, he wanted to reach up and tear his own eyes out. Against his big fingers, the eyeballs under the closed lids felt soft and flimsy. Life he thought was not of a piece, it could not be talked about; sometimes it could not even be lived. He could not even curse. He drove away.

CHAPTER XVII

"He thought so much of you," Marjorie Gibbons said to Ohnmachtig. They faced one another across a table on the terrace. "Maybe I shouldn't have told him. But I knew he would want to know." It was early the next morning. She was perfectly groomed in a green dress that left bare her golden shoulders. Only her eyes showed her distress.

"If I intend to keep a secret," he said, "I shouldn't write it down."

She shook her head and sighed deeply. He thought she was going to cry.

"It's not so terrible. Life goes on after the senses fade, after sight goes, or hearing. It is really not terrible never even to have had what I have had so long." He wanted to reach across the table and touch her hand, to comfort her, but he held back. Bright sunlight covered the terrace, and while it lasted he sat there the object of an almost unnerved sympathy from the woman and from his friend, wherever he might be. He did not need comfort, rather needed to give it. In that moment he felt his strength was partly his will and partly his power to reach others at the level of his grief. He could tell her nothing of his feelings; he could only watch her hold one tender hand to her forehead and begin to cry.

"He thought so much of you," she said in a choked voice as she wiped her eyes with a lace handkerchief, brilliantly white in her hand against her bronze cheek. "You know, Luther doesn't make friends easily."

Ohnmachtig turned away in embarrassment. He was half afraid that the friendship which meant so much to the rancher had to mean very little to him. He knew that he probably would not have stayed had it not been for the desperate loneliness which had driven him into the rancher's confidence. It was the future that embarrassed him, the time that must come when his former habits might reclaim him, or, quite as disturbing, the time when he would forsake his way of life in favor of he knew not what. He must leave. Would he come back, back to a friendship without kinship? Yet he was aware of a kinship, a rapport with Gibbons which he could not count because he could not name it. Perhaps he recognized in the big, simple man a brotherhood in the very loneliness he had come here to break.

But Gibbons had not come back that night. "I don't know where he could be," Marjorie Gibbons said. He hasn't ever gone away like this, not in ten years. Not without telling me he would be gone overnight." Neither of them wanted to make much of Gibbons' absence. They were waiting for the sound of his car laboring up the hill, waiting for

him to walk onto the terrace.

The architect finished his coffee and said, "Perhaps I could look for him, if someone would drive. I don't know the roads at all--"

She looked indecisive. "I couldn't ask you--"

"Please let me. It would ease our minds if we did something to try to find him, although I'm sure he will turn up soon.

She got up, smoothing her dress carefully. "I'll get Eddie to drive for you. She knows where you might find him."

The architect watched her walk briskly to the house, grateful for the bright color of her dress. In a moment she returned with Eddie, who, strangely for the hour, was dressed in saddle pants and a shirt instead of her dressing gown.

"Luther didn't come in?" he heard Eddie ask. "He's not here now?" Her mouth was full of something and she carried a cup of coffee.

"No, not all night. Now there's probably nothing to worry about, but we thought we'd better do something. Bob doesn't see too well, especially after dark, and there's a chance you might not get back till then." She did not look at the architect when she talked about his eyesight.

"Okay, I'll drive," Eddie said. "But let me finish

my breakfast first."

Ten minutes later, the architect and the girl were on the ranch road to the highway between Nalene and Lemington. They went to Nalene first, because it was larger, and Eddie thought Luther might have stayed in a hotel there. They tried the three larger hotels, and half a dozen other places she thought he might have gone, but no one had seen him or his car. So they doubled back and went to Lemington. It was half past one when they ate silently in a cafe on the outskirts of Lemington. They didn't have much to say to one another. Eddie was satisfied that it was the shock of the fire that prompted Luther to leave and the architect saw no reason to explain everything to her. So it was where Luther had gone rather than why that occupied their conversation. After they had gone over the possibilities three or four times, there was nothing to do but go over them again or be silent.

After lunch, a bartender in a bar across the street from the cafe--a friend of Eddie's--told her Luther had been in the bar last night, had sat there drinking, talking to no one, and had left around midnight, after cashing a check for two hundred dollars.

"He'd probably go the same direction I would from here," she said, "and anyway there's only one highway that goes anywhere from here." She turned the car north from

Lemington, and in ten miles they were in the midst of a barren country, cut with gullies and broken with wind-blasted rocks.

CHAPTER XVIII

Gibbons had spent the night in his car, sleeping a restless, drunken sleep. When he awoke, he had forgotten nothing; everything was there just as it had been before; there was not an instant of disremembrance. It was ten thirty, and as soon as he rubbed his eyes, he drove out of the picnic grounds he had parked in. The big car bounced on the little dirt road, but settled down smoothly on the highway. The disappearing road lulled him; his situation did not change, but everything seemed farther away; he was in a trance. A curve in the road brought him back.

Life was in two parts: the part underneath was little, he saw and heard it; hanging over it was a larger part, which he felt, and which was reality, made not of sights and sounds, but of knowledge and sorrow. The little part danced and moved, sang with the faraway music of the wheels on the road, pushed signs into his vision and jerked them away, spoke with mouths, touched with hands. It did not matter. The other hung over it, made it puny and ridiculous: the part that looked like nothingness, was quiet and dark.

Several times during the day, he stopped to drink

in roadside bars. Alcohol had never meant much to him and it did not do much to help him now; he kept drinking, hoping at least for unconsciousness. The faces in the bars seemed painted on fence posts to him; he said nothing to them, and they left him alone. At last the silence began to oppress him.

"How far is this place from Lemington?" he asked.

The bartender took a moment to finish wiping a glass and said, "Lemington. Well, that depends a good deal on the way you go. Now if you take Twenty Three to Kalish, then maybe it's two-fifty. But part of that's gravel and pretty broke up. Then you can take U.S. Sixteen to Red Lick, and on east from there. That must be two-seventy five, closer maybe to three. But it's oil all the way."

Gibbons had been drinking in the bar for an hour. He didn't know the name of the bar or the town it was in, even what part of the state he had driven to. Earlier, he had taken a room in the town's one hotel, and on the bed with its thin, white-painted iron frame he had tried to sleep. Failing this he went out and bought a razor, shaved, and went back out to find a bar. This was his second, or third; he could not remember how many he had been in; they all looked the same, racks of peanuts, neon lights, glasses on dark wood. Gibbons could not move forward out

of the bars, nor backwards out of them. He was trapped in the present, a prisoner of each minute counted off on the glowing clock in back of the bar.

Now he was trying to talk, to probe for exits. "Have you ever had somebody do a favor for you? A big favor?" The bartender looked like an owl to him, with big eyes and a sharp nose.

"What you mean?" the bartender asked.

"Do you a favor. That's all."

"Why sure. Lots of guys."

"One guy do you a favor."

"Not one. Lots of guys."

What could anyone say, who didn't know? What could they say if they did know? He drank from his glass. "What can you do for somebody who does you a big favor?" Favor? Now he was talking a foreign language, fighting through the wrong words he knew toward the right one he could not remember.

"A guy towed me in from Renchum once. Wouldn't take no money. So I give his old lady a box of candy from one of the punchboards."

Gibbons shook his head.

"Somebody must've really done you a good turn. If it was me, I'd like something to remember, a souvenir. Like a hundred bucks." He laughed, and winked at the other man in the bar.

"Make mine two," the other man said. "I can remember that a whole lot longer."

"What'd you do if you had just nine months left."

"Nine months left? You mean here? Jesus, I got a lot longer here than that, friend." The bartender smiled nervously.

"Nine months left to live."

The bartender went on smiling. "I sure wouldn't spend it here."

"Me neither," said the other man.

"Would you go home, maybe?"

"I just don't know where I'd go. Maybe home." Gibbons thought the bartender's smile was the smile of a man about to run away.

"If you'd lived someplace, and really liked it there," his voice trailed away. He put the glass to his lips. "I mean, if there was places you like, lots of places say, with lots of things to see, would you go on there?"

"I reckon I would," said the bartender. "Don't see why not. A man'd be a fool not to."

"I'd go to California," said the other man. "I might not last nine months if I had to go through the winter here. California's got this beat no matter how you look at it."

"Well, anyway I won't have to drive over the pass this winter," the bartender said. "We moved in town this

spring."

There was one way out, but it led only from the bar into darkness. The night was cold, and the darkness covered the city down to the rooftops, crept in between buildings. It was master. He thought, it is harder for me to take than to give. Harder for anyone, if they find it out. Otherwise nothing makes sense. Nothing I can give; it's the other way.

He got into his car in front of the hotel and drove into the darkness.

CHAPTER XIX

At mid-afternoon, Ohnmachtig and Eddie came to a junction, and on the advice of an old man who came out of the filling station to see why they stopped, they drove forty miles west on a gravel road to a town called Sunup. Another old man at another filling station told them the road west was closed, and that he hadn't seen a car of the kind they were looking for. So they drove back to the junction and north towards the town of Renchum.

A mile or so past the junction, a tire went flat. They put on the spare without incident, but for fear of being on the road without a spare, drove back to the junction to have the tire fixed. It took the old man an hour to fix the tire and change it for the spare, so it had been dark for an hour by the time they drove into Renchum.

No one they talked to had seen Luther or his car. They began to think he might have taken another road out of Lemington, perhaps south.

"I don't know," Eddie said. "We might as well go on to Templeton." They had a map spread out on a table in a bar. "If he's not there, then we've taken the wrong way for sure."

"Perhaps he's come back home." Ohnmachti wanted

to find his friend, but the search for him through the dismal hills had made him wish himself on his way, made him want to turn his back and be done with it.

"Maybe so."

"It might be a good idea if I called to find out."

There was a phone in the restaurant connected through a door with the bar. He had to shout to be heard, and it took half an hour to complete the call. Mrs. Laird said Luther had not come home; if there were no word of him in an hour, they were going to call the sheriff. He told the old woman they were in Renchum and were going across the mountains to Templeton. If they didn't find him there, they would start back.

"There's no word at the ranch," he said shaking his head.

"Maybe he's in California by now," Eddie said. "Maybe he couldn't take another winter in Montana." He knew she had been talking to two men sitting at the bar near the table. She spoke as much to them as to him. She had been drinking while he was making the phone call.

"Shall we go on now?"

"I don't see why, Bob. No. No, let's us stay now. I like it right here. Good company." She smiled at the men. One was no older than seventeen, the other past thirty. "Meet Billy and Royal." The men toasted him with their bottles of beer.

"How do you do?" he said. "We have to go, Edna. Will you excuse us?"

"Go, hell! Sit down. We been going all day. I'm tired of going."

"So am I," he began.

"Then sit down. Luther's old enough to find his way around this country. Money enough to buy it, if he don't like the way it's laid out." She drank from a glass of whiskey. "Anyway, he's probably clean to California by now."

Ohnmachtig guessed that Billy and Royal were enjoying themselves watching the blond girl make a fool of the little man with the glasses and he began to fear he was among the enemy.

"There ain't any other places better than this one around here, if that's what you're looking for," said Billy, the younger one. Both he and Royal were wearing white shirts open at the collar and tight denim pants.

"They don't serve no cocktails with candles on the table in Renchum. You got to take the atmosphere like you find it, us and all," Royal said with a grin.

She knew he was helpless. But he did not sit down. "If you want to drink, bo ahead. I'll wait in the restaurant." He drank two cups of coffee, and an hour passed. He went back.

Eddie had moved to the bar on a stool between the two men. "The party's just getting started," she said. She turned to him and leaned on one elbow. "You don't like this

one, go find yourself another one." She turned away.

He bore on. "I don't want to be rude. But this young lady's brother hasn't been heard from since last night. We're looking for him, and have a long way to drive to get home. We planned to look for him in Templeton."

"He's up and gone to California, didn't you know?" said Royal.

Billy said, "What's she want with a brother anyway? We'll take care of her like we was brothers, both of us." The men laughed and turned their backs on him.

He saw them in the mirror in back of the bar, and they saw him. "If a guy don't like a party in these parts," Royal said, "he goes and finds himself another one."

Billy said, "Yeah, so whyn't you go find him for yourself? Leave her here. She's all right, and you seem a heap more worried about her brother than she's worried. Go on yourself."

"I'm afraid I don't see well enough to drive at night," he said, hating to have to tell them.

"Reckon you'll have to stick around then. You can see all right to stick around, can't you?" said Royal.

"I'll be in the restaurant," the architect said to her.

"Take it easy on the coffee," Eddie called. "You might have to drive." Their laughter followed him through the door, and even after the noise of the restaurant swept

over it, he thought he could hear them laughing still.

An hour later, he went in, and an hour after that. The second time, he could not even make himself heard. Two more men and two more women were gathered around. The restaurant was closing, so he went outside. There was no light in the street.

It was as though he had stepped into a pit. He could see nothing across the street, could barely make out the dim shapes of what he knew must be the cars in front of the bar. There would be no busses, no taxis; he could not remember what had been on the other side of the street when they came into town, and he could imagine nothing that would be of help to him. He could not see to find the car, let alone drive it. He stood helpless, unable to go forwards or backwards.

"Watch out!" a voice shouted. "Look out where you're parking."

"I'm sorry, I beg your pardon," he said, stepping away.

"Well, don't run into me," said another man's voice, "just get the hell out of the way." It sounded as if there were a dozen of them. They swarmed around him, jostling him this way and that. "Jesus, is he polluted," a voice said. "Hey dad," said another, "how'd it get so wet inside?"

He wanted to shout that he couldn't see, that he was blind. But the words would not come to his lips, and

in a moment the men were gone. He stood breathing heavily for a moment, took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes.

The door of the bar opened, and he heard, "I left the fiddle in the car, be right back Sonny;" the sound of footsteps. The man ran into him, knocking him aside. The glasses fell out of his hands as he was whirled around.

"Dammit, pops, if I bump into you again, I'll put you to sleep and stack you out of the way."

"My glasses!" he said in panic.

A car door opened and slammed. He stood as though he were paralyzed. I must not move, he thought, they're somewhere close. I must not move.

"Will you help me, please?" he called to the voice, "I've lost my glasses, I can't see without them." He fought to keep his voice from shrieking.

"Nothing to look at out here," the voice said over the sound of running footsteps. "I got to get inside to play my fiddle." The bar door slammed.

He did not move. There was no sound. "Will someone help me?" he said without raising his voice. He waited in the silence. A door opened somewhere along the street, he thought. "Will someone help me?" he called. His answer was a burst of music from the bar.

He was among the enemy completely now, the foe his isolation now literal in the dark. He knelt to his conqueror and felt with his hands around the place he had been standing.

He dared not move far for fear he would lose track of the place he had been when he dropped the glasses. From the bar, he heard a rush of music now and then, and he could distinguish the fiddle's cry above it all. All he could see of the bar was a dull orange glow, the sign over the door. Everywhere else was blackness, and he looked imploringly up at the glow every few minutes. Several times he stopped when he thought he heard someone, but the only sound he knew was made by human beings who came from the bar.

Then he heard something puzzling, far off. He held his breath to listen, and got up to his feet slowly when he realized it was a siren.

The headlights of the car were racing specks of light as it went past him screaming like a mad thing in pain or anger. After it went by, he saw a red light staring at him like an eye, growing fainter and dimmer until it went out altogether.

He went to his knees again, crawling in a wider area between a board fence and the line of parked cars. He did not know how long it took him to find the glasses, but his hand touched them by the front wheel of a car. He felt them carefully to see if they were damaged, then slowly put them on, still kneeling. As if through a tunnel he saw the outline of the bar, and he rose and went to it.

He felt as though he had stepped into water above his head when he went through the door; as though his lungs filled up with something he could not breathe. In the quiet corners of the room smoke hung in layers like blue streaks in agate. He imagined he could put out his hand and touch the noise. What he heard seemed to be a common voice split in many parts, shouting, singing, laughing for every man and woman in the place, but mechanically produced and broadcast into the room.

He saw Eddie's lips moving in the collective sound, but he could not tell her voice from the rest. He tried to speak to her again.

CHAPTER XX

Gibbons' funeral came at the beginning of winter. More people came than the chapel could seat, so folding chairs were set up in the foyer, and heavy, gold-colored curtains drawn over the windows. Those in the foyer could not see the minister, but they could hear him talking from far away. The skies over Nalene were the color of zinc, and a cold wind blew from the northwest. The funeral directors were everywhere whispering, their faces as sombre as the sky.

Many came because of connections with the Gibbons family that had not extended to Luther's generation, others because their names demanded they pay respects to his name; ranchers from all quarters of the counties came in holding their hats and looking afraid rather than sorrowful. And two old ladies, both of whom had Minnie for a first name, came because they went to everyone's funeral.

Eddie did not come. She was in a hospital where they had taken her the day she and the architect got home. He had waited until the bar closed, and she had come with him to the car, drunk and angry at the men she had been with. She slept in the back seat, and he sat in the front waiting for dawn. At the junction of the wrong turn the

day before, the old man told him what had happened and who had been killed.

"There was a fellow got killed from down your way last night," the old man had told him when Ohnmachtig stopped for gas. "Same county as you, I see by your plates there."

"What happened?" he asked. In the back seat Eddie moaned in her sleep.

"Well, they say there was a fellow following along after him saw it all. Tried to miss a jackrabbit and went off. Between Renchum and Templeton, on the pass. Damn fool, if you ask me. I wouldn't miss no damn jackrabbit if I could help it."

"Who was it?" Ohnmachtig asked.

"They say his name was Gibbons, big rancher down in your neck of the woods."

It had all seemed a weird joke; he was in a waxworks, locked in, and someone had set a robot in motion to torment him. The old man was not a human being: he could see the imperfections around the eyes; the mouth was not hinged right--it moved too loosely; the hair was false, made from the fur of some animal; the skin was of wrinkled rubber painted clumsily. He could remember nothing else until he had been on the highway driving for a long while.

The architect had been certain of nothing in the days since except his existence, the ache in his nerves that was his senses. Sorrow was a shape into which he twisted himself for the world he could not be certain existed where he saw it. The hours he spent in sympathy were minutes in his mind; the real hours were passed in dull endurance of a frozen storm.

Marjorie had inherited the ranch, but she planned to sell it. Amos had come back, resentful of everything but subdued. He went to the funeral with his sister on his arm, awkward in a blue suit, sullen and long-faced. The old man followed stiffly in a mask of grief and the courage of experience. When they told him his nephew was dead, he had gone to his rooms in the new house, overlooking the black char of the house he was born in, and had cried, weeping in the way of the aged, with many tears but no sobs. Mrs. Laird was on his arm, red-eyed and tired, as they entered the mourners' screened room. "He looks so natural," Mrs. Laird had said when they had gone to see the remains the day before. Tears had flowed down her round cheeks, and fallen to the printed flowers on her bosom. He had been as peaceful as the embalmer's art could make him, and that was peaceful indeed.

Ohnmachtig sat solemnly among the mourners as a pallbearer. Dark red drapes muffled the involuntary sounds

of life in the dim chapel.

"He was a man of the soil," the minister chanted, "a rancher with broad lands, yes, but not the special lands of the privileged, but the same lands that nourish us all, rich and poor, large and small, the lands God has given us to work. His was the joy of the earth."

Ohnmachtig took off his glasses and held a hand over his eyes to shut out the little light left. The glasses dropped to the thick rug without a sound, and he bent forward to feel for them.

"This is not forever, my beloved. This is not forever. The day will come when this man, dear friends and kin gathered here, when this man will walk fields broader than he ever walked on earth. He will be among his dear friends that have gone before." Ohnmachtig tried to see his fellow mourners.

"Then, beloved, the dead shall rise. In that glorious day, the dead shall rise and be as the living."

Ohnmachtig's lips moved without a sound. He talked to the heavens hidden at the beginning of winter, prayed perhaps. "Let it not be true," he said. "If it be silence, he said, let it be silence. If it be grief, all grief; joy, all joy. If there is light for me or another man, let there be no darkness."

He flinched when they closed the lid of the coffin, but his face was set as he helped the other men carry it out into the wind.

EPILOGUE

So afterwards my friend Robert Ohnmachtig returned for a moment to that Europe which he had really been unable to leave. There, for so many years, he had been content to be alone on streets usually much narrower and often darker than that broad avenue Rotebuhlstrasse on which his vision of the other world walked out of the night to smile at him. He had failed to find intimacy with the mainstream of life, which, in his torment, he had thought of as his only salvation. He could imagine no other way out which would leave him free; he told me he had decided to lose his freedom as an alternative. He thought he had learned in his attempt to turn his lonely art into a passport to the other world that he must now give up both worlds. Certainly nothing was left of the world of beauty; he had loved what he had seen, and although he might try to substitute music for the delights of the dead sense, no illusion could take the place of the one he had spent his life creating. Perhaps he was grateful that his second illusion, for that is what he must have come to consider his hope of finding himself in the rancher's world, had broken in months instead of years, even if he had to carry the price of his friend's death in that account until the end. Now he would, he told me, take what remained of his

light to a place of solitude and silence, where the mark of his difference might be forgiven, or even ignored.

Five years after I last saw him that summer afternoon in Paris, I received the following letter.

Most Esteemed Sir:

I am complying with a request made to me by a person who called you his friend to notify you when he passed to his reward. His name in religion was Brother Joseph, and because he had some knowledge of building, he worked in silence among us as a carpenter. When he first came here some years ago, he told me he was fleeing from life because he could find no place in it. Perhaps it will lessen your grief to know that he found a place here. When he came, too, he was afraid that he was going to become blind. Shortly before his death, he made a special point of asking me to tell you that his prayers to St. Jude for intercession had been answered, for until his eyes were closed in that brief sleep before judgement, he kept his eyesight. His years as a Trappist Brother were not easy ones except that they were dedicated to God, but he did what was asked of him cheerfully and well. Fully confessed to his God, he died on November 3 of this year. May he rest in that peace so elusive in this world, but so certain in the next, and may you

find comfort in this knowledge of his reward.

Your Servant, etc.

Jaime de las Piedras, O. C. R.

Abbot-General

Abbey of Our Lady of Sorrows

Villalejos, Spain